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Thesis Project

TWO MEN, TWO MOVEMENTS AND OUR CALL TO SEEK JUSTICE: BAYARD RUSTIN, TROY PERRY AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS AND GAY RIGHTS MOVEMENTS

BY

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Dedication

With humility and gratitude, I dedicate this body of work:

In celebration of the women who first taught me that God's love is greater than any regulation, denomination or religion

Ms. Bertha Cooley
Ms. Essie Randall

In gratitude for my parents who grew in their love and acceptance of me

Mrs. Joyce Cooley DuBose
Mr. W.C. DuBose, Jr.
(January 21, 1935 – April 24, 2010)

In appreciation for the men and women who make it possible for me to be who I am, loving the person I love, doing what I do.

Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)--Atlanta
Members & Friends of Our Hope Metropolitan Community Church
Rev. Troy D. Perry, Jr.
Mr. Bayard Rustin

In eternal love and amazement for the beautiful woman I am blessed to share my life, my love and my dreams with.

Ms. Elizabeth Donielle (Dondi) Vickers

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Preface

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. noted "the hope of the world is still in dedicated minorities. The trailblazers in human, academic, scientific and religious freedom have always been in the minority." Indeed, dedicated minorities have made all the difference in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's and the Gay Rights Movement.

The impetus for this thesis was the 2004 grassroots effort to defeat Amendment 1 in my home state of Georgia. During that experience I witnessed some of the unfinished racial and relational work that exists between members of the African American and GLBT communities as well as the tension of those who identify as both African American and GLBT. This paper offers insights regarding some of the similarities and differences of the Civil Rights and Gay Rights Movements in order to continue the dialogue between members of these two important social movements.

This body of work examines the lives of two dedicated men, Bayard Rustin and Troy D. Perry, Jr. and their unwavering commitment to their respective movements: Civil Rights Movement and Gay Rights Movement.

The question, "what can the Gay Rights Movement learn from the Civil Rights Movement in order to create a more just and equitable society?" is considered based on historic and literary analysis of materials pertaining to the men and their movements.

Practical suggestions are offered to leaders of the Gay Rights Movement based on insights and accomplishments within the Civil Rights Movement. A call to action is issued to this generation of social activists, as well as to members of faith communities and all fair minded people who are dedicated to and seek a more just society.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness

In the second chapter of the United States' *Declaration of Independence* these words can be found:

> We hold these truths to be self-evident that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable (sic) Rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness - that to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed.[1]

The founding fathers of this nation set forth their moral vision and the governing principles for this country in the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution. This seminal passage holds vast possibility and potential. However, as impressive as these words are, some citizens are prohibited from experiencing these promised rights and realities. Throughout our country's history, excluded members of society have felt the deep yearning for equality and justice. The higher law, some would say God's law, offers a higher sense of right and wrong from which to create human law. This higher law also grants people the right to criticize human law when said laws diminish equal rights or demean humanity.

In the United States, African Americans, women, and other marginalized groups have turned to the higher law to criticize societal bias and human hatred. Courageous men and women have insisted on full access to their rights: those rights offered by government, but more importantly, rights offered by their Creator. These men and women actively lived Life, gained Liberty and pursued

their understanding of Happiness - while also honoring the equal rights of others.

The broad ideal that all people have the right to Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness is one of the underpinnings of my commitment to social justice and the creation of this thesis project.

Brief Overview and Social Location

My interest in this topic began in 2003-2004, following the legalization of same sex marriage in Massachusetts. Little did I know that marriage equality in Massachusetts would have such far reaching and negative effects in my home state of Georgia. Who knew that fighting for the right to love and marry the person of one's choice would create such overwhelming reactions? Who knew loving someone of the same gender could create such a firestorm of hatred and condemnation from religious people?

In 2004, I discovered what I had long suspected: that God, Jesus and particularly the Bible were still being used by some to oppress, condemn and justify bigotry, homophobia and hatred of anyone who was different. As a social justice activist in Georgia during the 2004 fight against Senate Resolution 595, which then became Amendment 1,[2] I felt a strong desire to better understand the Gay Rights Movement and the Civil Rights Movement. During this time, gay Georgians often compared the Gay Rights struggle to the Civil Rights Movement, which often led to a polarization between white gays and lesbians and African American heterosexuals (particularly clergy) - as well as African American gays and lesbians. Some Civil Rights leaders spoke of similarities between these two

social movements, while others were adamantly opposed to a comparison of the Civil Rights Movement to the Gay Rights Movement.

As a leader in several grassroots organizations fighting Georgia's discriminatory anti-gay marriage amendment, I learned firsthand what it felt like to be a member of a marginalized group who sought rights from a majority group who did not care to provide justice or equality for all. I also believed in the higher law of God that called for the criticism of the inequalities of the lower laws of man and society. During this historic interplay, I began to wonder how these two social justice movements could be similar and different. As a pastor of a multi-ethnic Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) in Athens, Georgia, I wanted to be better equipped to intelligently converse with members, friends and community leaders about social justice issues as they pertain to race, sexual orientation and human rights.

Additionally, given my position within MCC, I wanted to deconstruct what I had been taught as a child within the Baptist church. As an openly lesbian Christian minister, I have sought new ideas to positively influence who I am becoming as a progressive follower of Christ. To this end, I seek to answer the following thesis question:

> ***"What can the Gay Rights Movement learn from the Civil Rights Movement in order to contribute to a more just and equitable society?"***

Specifically, this thesis will examine my own personal life experience and the lives of Bayard Rustin and Troy Perry as leaders in their respective

movements. Additional examination will be paid to their commitment to NVDA. Rustin and Perry's social activism and literary works will be analyzed in order to glean insights and applicable strategies for present and future leaders of the Gay Rights Movement. Particular attention will be given to both men's spirituality and leadership strategies. Criticisms of both Rustin and Perry will also be analyzed. The overall purpose of this work is to use historic documents about the lives of these two men to educate and inspire a new generation of grassroots social activists who are spiritually and socially committed to a more just and equitable society.

My work in the area of social justice, particularly as a lesbian Christian minister in MCC, drives my desire to better grasp the success of the Civil Rights Movement, while seeking to know, understand and implement their strategies and tools within the contemporary Gay Rights Movement. I am particularly interested in developing and nurturing the spirituality of GLBT people as a legitimate tool for social transformation.

Methodology

In this thesis, I will look for common themes between the Civil Rights Movement and the Gay Rights Movement. Specifically, I will examine the lives of Bayard Rustin, an African American Civil Rights leader who identified as a Quaker and was openly homosexual and Troy Perry, a Southern, white, gay man who founded the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Church (UFMCC). I believe that the comparison of Rustin and Perry's work will offer

spiritual tools and strategies that are similar in purpose, yet are different in their movements.

My life as an out lesbian who is also called to Christian ministry within MCC affords me a unique opportunity to utilize my own experiences, insights and varied observations to embody the Gay Rights perspective, while attempting to better understand the Civil Rights perspective from research and historical documents on the life of Bayard Rustin.

Limitations

I will not perform an exhaustive study of either the Gay Rights or the Civil Rights Movements. I will only research the lives of Bayard Rustin and Troy Perry as leaders within their respective movements. My social position includes the following realities and limitations: I am a Caucasian female from the South; an out lesbian; a Christian minister within MCC. Additionally, I am not able to fully understand the African American struggle for civil rights. Neither can I comprehend the struggle of an African American who identifies as GLBT.

Furthermore, my evaluation and implementation will come from a spiritual perspective. I am most interested in Christian faith communities within the GLBT community and not the entire Gay Rights Movement. Neither can I speak for other GLBT people of faith who do not identify as Christian and progressive.

Purpose and Significance

I believe that this topic is significant because as twenty first century global citizens we must learn to live with each other. The days of lifelong isolation and

homogenous existence are almost extinct. Our perceived differences of race, gender, religion, political affiliations and sexual orientation do not negate our higher calling to be spiritual brothers and sisters. As a follower of Christ, I believe the universal Christian church's misuse and literal interpretation of the Bible are used as weapons to promote interlocking oppressions against a myriad of people. The history of Christianity is littered with the horrors that came from the misinterpretation of Scripture that supported societal bias and personal agendas. By calling attention to and highlighting the lives of people like Bayard Rustin and Troy Perry, hopefully each of us can be inspired to be one more ordinary person who dares to serve an extraordinary God for the good of others.

I specifically chose the Gay Rights Movement because, as a member of this movement, I choose to examine possible strategies to combat oppression and inequity. I chose the Civil Rights Movement because of its deeply spiritual roots, my respect for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and because I believe the Civil Rights Movement was one of the most politically successful social movements in history.

This topic is important to me because I believe that spiritual people of goodwill can learn from a collective past and build strong coalitions, which bring about positive change for this and future generations. Additionally, we all need to learn to converse intelligently and respectfully within our churches and with family, friends and with national and community leaders regarding social justice issues.

Chapter Breakdowns

Chapter Two chronicles the life and legacy of Bayard Rustin. Rustin's early influences, along with his commitment to NVDA will be noted. Rustin's work with Martin Luther King Jr., other movement leaders and multiple social movements will show a gifted strategist who was rarely accepted because he was homosexual. Rustin's spirituality and his practice of NVDA grounded him as he worked tirelessly for equality.

Chapter Three describes the journey of Rev. Troy D. Perry, Jr. With a strong theme of spirituality at every stage of his journey, Perry became the primary progressive voice for GLBT Christians. Perry's use of King's methods and strategies, particularly NVDA, indirectly links Perry to Rustin. Perry's founding of UFMCC and his involvement in the broader Gay Rights Movement will be discussed. Although retired, Perry continues to fight for GLBT people in the area of marriage equality.

Chapter Four situates the Civil Rights and Gay Rights Movements within the larger scheme of social movements. A brief overview of these common realities as they pertain to both movements will be discussed. Both similarities and differences of the two movements will be noted based on Rustin and Perry's writings and interviews.

Chapter Five elaborates on the story that developed this thesis. Additionally, the lessons the Gay Rights Movement can learn from the Civil Rights Movement are noted. The chapter concludes with practical suggestions

for personal and faith based actions, using contemporary tools for educating this generation of future leaders in creating a more equitable society.

Notes

[1] *The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, 2002), 3.

[2] In January 2004 members of the Georgia State Senate introduced legislation, Senate Resolution 595 that proposed a Constitutional amendment to allow the state to only recognize marriage between a man and a woman. The resolution passed in both the Georgia Senate and House of Representatives. The resolution then became Amendment 1 on the November ballot. Georgia voters passed the amendment in November 2004 by a margin of 77% to 23%.

Chapter Two

Bayard Rustin: An Excluded Includer

I believe in social dislocation and creative trouble.[1]
~Bayard Rustin

I pledge my heart and my mind and my body, unequivocally and without regard to personal sacrifice, to the achievement of social peace through social justice.[2]
~Pledge by the March on Washington Participants

Introduction

Grandson of a former slave, Quaker, pacifist, African American, college drop out, draft resister, ex-Communist, Socialist, proponent of Nonviolent Direct Action, homosexual, deputy director for the 1963 March on Washington, mentor to Dr. King, integrationist, social activist. This was Bayard Taylor Rustin. For seven and a half decades (1912-1987), Bayard Rustin embodied these identities as he worked to create a more just society. Yet Rustin was often excluded from the movements and communities in which he was intimately connected. Once praised by Harry McPherson, President Lyndon B. Johnson's chief counsel, as one of "the five smartest men in America", [3] Rustin was a brilliant civil rights strategist and negotiator. Yet few people, beyond the inner circle of leaders of the Civil Rights Movement, even knew who Bayard Rustin was prior to the 1963 March on Washington. He worked widely in the peace, labor and Civil Rights Movements during his more than sixty years of political activism. The primary obstacle that prevented Rustin from being recognized at forefront of any social movement was society's aversion to his homosexuality. He was a pioneer during a time when people could not appreciate his talents and gifts.

Although an influential, behind the scenes leader during the 1950's and 1960's, Rustin's homosexuality and affiliation as a Young Communist served to minimize how visible he could be in the Civil Rights Movement. As a civil rights, labor and nonviolent activist he fought against social, racial and economic barriers to aid the oppressed and disadvantaged.

Social justice seekers of the 21st century deserve to know more about this unique leader of the Civil Rights Movement. The truth of Bayard Rustin's life as well as his insightful strategies for social justice and equality are needed and timely for our generation, nation and world.

Early Childhood and Family Influences

Bayard Taylor Rustin was born on March 17, 1912, to Florence Taylor Rustin and Archie Hopkins in West Chester, Pennsylvania. His parents were teenagers who were not emotionally mature enough to rear the young child. Rather, his maternal grandparents, Janifer and Julia Rustin raised him as their own son, although in time he learned the truth about his biological parents. Fortunately, Rustin was deeply loved as a youngster, and as a result had a strong sense of self confidence and a healthy ego.[4]

Julia Rustin's education at the local Friends School led her to be one of the first blacks to have a high school education. Because she and her family were connected to some of the leading Quaker families in West Chester, she was viewed as a member of the area's privileged black community. Julia's exposure to the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)[5] stayed with her and

influenced her throughout her entire life.[6] This spiritual background was then handed down to her youngest grandson, Bayard.

Based on numerous sources and interviews, Julia Rustin was the greatest religious and social influence in Bayard Rustin's life. Julia's ongoing commitment to her teachings from the Society of Friends impacted not only her spirituality, but also deeply influenced Rustin. She impressed upon the young Rustin the Quaker principles of equality of all human beings before God; the vital need for nonviolence; and the importance of dealing with everyone with love and respect.[7] Julia Rustin also offered Rustin a rare glimpse into "embodied spirituality" as she lived out her beliefs in action. In the midst of her community and civil activities, Julia Rustin continually worked to teach her grandson how to be tolerant and empathetic toward other people.[8]

Rustin was an excellent student when it came to embodying the Christian teachings that he learned from his grandmother. These teachings called for him to treat all people with respect, to listen to all sides of a controversy and to serve others. Julia Rustin blended a Quaker service ethic with African American traditions of community solidarity to build a strong embodiment of what the world needed to be for her, for those she loved and future generations.[9] Bayard Rustin formally joined the Society of Friends in 1936.

Young Adult Years and Influences

Bayard attended the integrated local high school, where he excelled in sports, music and academics. Upon graduation, he faced an uncertain

educational future. His grandmother, however, convinced an AME Church bishop to help him receive a music scholarship to Wilberforce University. Although Rustin was certainly talented enough to be at Wilberforce, he only stayed for a year, and then returned home to attend Cheney State College, a training school for teachers founded by Quakers.[10]

Rustin moved to Harlem in 1937 and became a lifelong resident of New York City. He returned to school, this time to the City College of New York, but did not graduate. Rustin never became a college graduate; although in later years, he received at least fifteen honorary degrees from such prominent institutions as Brown, Harvard and Yale universities.[11]

During his time at City College, Rustin began organizing the Young Communist League (YCL). The YCL appealed to Rustin because of its progressive views regarding racial equality. However, he became disheartened and in 1941, broke with the YCL when the organization supported segregation within the American military following the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. Although Rustin ended his involvement with this group, his short time with the YCL haunted him in later years, as people often accused him of being a Communist and used it as a reason to marginalize and discredit him.

Following his break with the YCL, he aligned himself with A. Philip Randolph, the leading voice for African Americans and leader of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Rustin began working as the youth director for the 1941 March on Washington, which was being planned to protest discrimination within

the defense industry. The 1941 March on Washington was eventually called off by Randolph, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued an executive order (#8802), which forbade discrimination based on race when employing workers within the defense industry. Rustin disagreed with the decision and was estranged from Randolph for a period of time.[12]

Even with the disagreement, Randolph remained a strong influence in Rustin's life. Randolph was less judgmental than other leaders, which enabled Rustin to have support no matter what he might have been going through in his personal life. The elder mentor responded favorably to Rustin's ability to envision, organize and implement incredibly complex events for the overall good of the justice, peace and labor movements. Randolph is credited with introducing Rustin to the teachings of Mohandas Gandhi.

During Rustin's temporary break from Randolph, he became involved with the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), a non-denominational religious group that sought racial equality. It was while Rustin was a part of this justice seeking organization that he met Abraham Johannes (A.J.) Muste, for whom he worked as a field agent. While Rustin was with FOR, his primary responsibilities included speaking and training people in the use of NVDA as a viable means to bring about social change. Muste, a religiously fundamental minister of FOR, was a father figure to Rustin and this caused conflict in their mentor-mentee relationship.[13]

Leader of Nonviolent Direct Action

One of the greatest gifts that Muste gave to Rustin was a modeling of how to use NVDA as a tool for social change. The use of NVDA was introduced to the United States in the 1950's and came from India via the "Historic Peace Churches" - Quakers, Mennonites and Brethren - who opposed all acts of violence, including war.[14]

NVDA originated with Mohandas Gandhi from India who called for *satyagrapha*, literally "truth insistence". This social philosophy first came to the United States by way of two books from the 1930's: *The Power of Non-Violence* (by Richard Gregg) and *War without Violence* (by Krishnalal Shridharani). Both books were moral and spiritual treatises for advocating NVDA. Shirdharani's book offered practical steps on how NVDA is to be executed.[15] With Muste's influence, Rustin made this method of social change his own.

Before Rustin, much of the nonviolent tradition of United States was either pacifist or non-cooperation. NVDA was different in principle and practice. A pacifist or non-cooperative person did not confront or try to end the inequalities within society. NVDA originators sought points of contact where inequalities could be actively opposed and perhaps ended - all without violence or destroying either the human opponent or larger society.[16] Rustin believed that while pacifism and other forms of non-participation involved passive resistance to societal ills NVDA required confrontation at the pressure points that were most oppressive, which led him to believe that NVDA would be more effective in challenging and

changing injustices within society.[17]

Rustin believed that he and others committed to NVDA were called to be "angelic troublemakers" to the point where they made the status quo unworkable. He taught them that the only weapons nonviolent leaders had were their bodies. His worldview required that he show concern for the American Negro as well as all races and oppressed minorities. Rustin's temperament caused him to be a strong advocate, as a social reformer with a never ending commitment to extend human rights and democracy to all citizens of the world.[18]

In the United States, Bayard Rustin embodied Gandhi's NVDA better than anyone of his time. Some historians and peers of Rustin even called him "The American Gandhi".[19] Rustin actively embodied this type of NVDA for roughly sixty years from the 1930's, well into the late 1980's.[20] Using NVDA as a spiritual tool against evil was Rustin's constant method that informed his social philosophy.[21]

Rustin had an opportunity to practice NVDA in June 1946 when the United States Supreme Court ruled that segregation in interstate transportation was unconstitutional in the case of *Morgan vs. Virginia*. In 1946, the most active members of the radical left were associated with two interrelated organizations, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and its parent group, FOR. White FOR member, George Houser and Bayard Rustin spearheaded the "Journey of Reconciliation"[22] to test the enforcement of the Supreme Court's decision. The Journey of Reconciliation provided a model for later rides: the Freedom Rides in

the 1960's[23] as well as the Soul Force Equality Rides in 2006, 2007 and 2008 and 2010.[24]

In addition to Rustin's NVDA within the United States, he also traveled abroad to assist in racial and social justice training in such places as Nigeria, the Gold Coast, Ghana and South Africa.[25] Between scheduled trips to Africa, Rustin traveled and lectured on behalf of FOR. While on one such trip along the west coast of the United States in January 1953, personal disaster struck. Following a successful speaking engagement in Pasadena, California, Rustin was arrested and convicted on a morals charge - which was the term to describe homosexual sex acts in public - and sentenced to sixty days in the Los Angeles County Jail. Following Rustin's conviction and public disclosure of being a homosexual, he was forced to resign his post with FOR and the executive committee released a lengthy statement distancing the organization from and severing all ties to Rustin.[26]

After this incident Rustin was at an all-time low, feeling lost and depressed. Six months later, he became director of the War Resisters League (WRL), a position he held for twelve years. Branded a 'sexual pervert' by leaders in the Civil Rights Movement and larger society, Rustin was excluded from any visible position of leadership within that movement. Rustin's brilliance as an intellectual strategist was overshadowed by society's judgment of his homosexuality.[27] For the immediate future, Rustin was content to expand the scope of the WRL to include civil rights and equality in Africa. Rustin helped form

In Friendship, a group committed to providing financial assistance to Southern African Americans who were fighting racial discrimination. *In Friendship* had just begun its financial aid campaign when a racial event in Montgomery, Alabama forced the nation to take notice of the plight of African Americans in the Southern United States.

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat in the Colored section of a Montgomery bus to a white person.[28] Parks' refusal to give up her seat and her subsequent arrest became the seminal events that started the modern Civil Rights Movement. Following this, Rustin was called upon to serve in this emerging movement.

The Man, The Movement and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

> My activism did not spring from being black. Rather it is rooted fundamentally in my Quaker upbringing and the values instilled in me by the grandparents who reared me. Those values were based on the concept of a single human family and the belief that all members of that family are equal. The racial injustice that was present in this country United States during my youth was a challenge to my belief in the oneness of the human family. It demanded my involvement in the struggle to achieve interracial democracy; but it is very likely that I would have been involved had I been a white person with the same philosophy…[29]
>
> ~Bayard Rustin

Although Rustin's commitment was broader than the Civil Rights Movement, his most important contributions would occur in this area, where he served as the strategist of the nascent movement. Rustin traveled to Montgomery, Alabama in February 1956, following the bombings of King's home, to provide Dr. King with timely and practical advice on how to utilize the teachings of NVDA in the boycott of the public transportation system.[30] Rustin

was the person who first introduced NVDA as a movement strategy to the greater Civil Rights Movement and to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., in particular. His steadfast commitment to NVDA enabled the Civil Rights Movement to remain positive in the midst of overwhelming obstacles.

On loan from the WRL, at the request of A. Philip Randolph, Rustin was sent to Montgomery to advise Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on how to proceed by using NVDA in the early days of the bus boycott. His comprehensive back-ground in the theory, overall approach and strategy of NVDA proved invaluable and laid the groundwork for his ongoing working relationship with Dr. King.[31] Rustin's ability to think creatively and offer wise counsel at a moment's notice enabled him to influence Dr. King and other visible leaders who were at forefront of the movement. Rustin helped to shape Dr. King's developing ideology, intellectual arguments and in-the-field strategies.

Upon his arrival in Montgomery in February 1956, Rustin was excited to find a fertile opportunity for NVDA in the Deep South. He recommended several ideas to the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) which included calling the movement a nonviolent protest rather than a boycott in order to keep the mode of protest foremost in everyone's mind, and to have as the slogan for the movement "Victory without Violence".[32]

A new tactic Rustin encouraged was to have people who were indicted to voluntarily turn themselves into city officials. This power of choice energized the group and offered those committed to the cause a tangible victory in the area of

nonviolent protest. The spiritual underpinnings of this protest were evident in the participants' commitment to pray for their own freedom, for their oppressors and for all men to become brothers and to live in a just and equal society.[33] Other strategies included an essay contest for high school students to write about NVDA as a strategy to gain equal rights, a pamphlet on nonviolence, and solid preaching in the churches regarding NVDA and the overall movement.[34]

The Montgomery Bus Protest was a success and afterward, one of the key insights provided by Rustin was the need for a permanent organization that could sustain and embody the lessons learned in Montgomery. The permanent organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), was founded in January 1957 as an assembly of Black Southern ministers whose purpose was to "redeem the soul of America" through NVDA.[35] The idea for such a group was conceived by secular minded activists in New York: Rustin, Stanley Levison and Ella Baker. In 1957, this trio of activists created working papers for the SCLC and presented them to Dr. King with an outline that included mass direct action against racial discrimination, voter education and outreach. This strategy caused the SCLC to become a major force in developing the Civil Rights Movement.[36]

Bayard Rustin, even as an outsider, continued to be involved in racial justice, peace work and domestic and international social justice from 1959-1963.

The 1963 March on Washington

Perhaps Rustin's most extraordinary achievement was as deputy director

and chief organizer of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, which was the largest mass demonstration in the history of the United States. A. Philip Randolph asked Rustin to organize a massive March on Washington to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. Both men took for granted that Rustin would be the March's director; however, the conservative members of the coalition felt that he was too controversial to direct the march. The reasons cited included: his resisting the draft, being a former Communist and being arrested and convicted for homosexual activity.[37] Even though Rustin was the most qualified and capable person to direct the 1963 March on Washington, he was not appointed director. In the end, Randolph was named the March's official director and promptly named Rustin as Deputy Director and chief organizer.[38] With only seven weeks until the March, Rustin organized and coordinated an event that drew over 250,000 people to the Lincoln Memorial in support of civil rights legislation. The event took place on August 28, 1963 and catapulted Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and his *"I Have a Dream"* speech to international prominence.

Until he appeared on the magazine cover of *LIFE* on September 2, 1963 alongside A. Philip Randolph, few people even knew who Bayard Rustin was; much less that he was the organizer and overseer of the entire event. Bayard Rustin's ability to organize the massive event and manage the various civil rights organizations and their leaders was a testament to his unwavering commitment to social justice and equality for all people.

Life After the March

Even with the publicity following the March on Washington, Rustin still needed a platform from which to work. So in 1964, he helped found the A. Philip Randolph Institute, which was a civil and workers' rights organization. Rustin served as its executive director from 1964 until his death in 1987.[39]

By 1965, with segregation outlawed, Rustin felt like the civil rights movement should move away from militant action in the street and transition toward the greater challenge of forming progressive alliances with other minority groups in the United States. He envisioned a coalition of African Americans, trade unions, liberals and religious groups. He opposed single identity politics which led to harsh criticism from the Black Power movement.[40] In the waning years of the 1960's, a more militant faction of the movement began to move further and further away from using NVDA. The assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4, 1968, created a leadership vacuum that hastened the splintering of the integrationists and the separatists[41] within the Civil Rights Movement. In the final years of the 1960's, Rustin was a vocal detractor of black power ideology and its separatist mentality. Separatism ran counter to his commitment to bridge building and integration. Rustin was openly critical of the younger leaders whom he felt replaced the movement's substance and strategy with mere style and slogan.[42] Separatist leaders were also critical of Rustin.

As Rustin's influence within the Civil Rights Movement lessened, he continued his international work for civil rights through the Freedom House, a

non-partisan organization that monitored elections and human rights in various countries around the world. Rustin worked tirelessly in the late 1970's and 1980's to bring forth democracy throughout the world.[43]

Homosexuality and the Man

In the final years of his life, Rustin was more open regarding his own sexuality. He had become aware of his sexuality at age fourteen during an overnight visit with his biological mother when he had to share a bed with a man who was staying in the house. They had sex together that night and not long after the incident Bayard had a candid conversation with his grandmother, Julia. During the conversation Rustin noted how much he enjoyed dating men, whereupon his grandmother surmised that she supposed that dating men was what he needed to do.[44] His grandmother's support prevented any feelings of shame and Rustin did not feel the need to hide his sexuality from his immediate family. He found that the African American community accepted homosexuals as long as they were not flamboyant; however, Rustin also learned that African American homosexuals experienced discrimination from both African American and Caucasian communities.[45]

Following his arrest in 1953, Rustin made a commitment to himself to sublimate his sexual desires in order to live without condemnation in the world of his day; however, he eventually abandoned this view and lived as an openly homosexual man. As Rustin grew in his understanding of homosexuality and himself, he found personal acceptance. After 1953, his speeches and writings

contained fewer references to "God" and "Jesus". As Daniel Levine noted, following his arrest on morals charges, "In 1941, Communism failed him. In 1953, in his hour of need, organized Christianity failed him. After 1953, Bayard became a more and more secular man."[46] Once Rustin made peace with being a homosexual, he argued that discrimination against homosexuals was parallel to discrimination against African Americans.[47]

When Rustin began to work with Dr. King, there was a dilemma regarding Rustin's sexuality. King appointed a committee to study what he should do about having a homosexual on his staff. The committee members felt that King should distance himself from Rustin and although King was deeply torn about their suggestion, he did acquiesce and severed official ties with Rustin. Privately, King continued to seek advice from Rustin. Years later, Rustin came to believe that King did not have a problem with his sexuality. According the Rustin, "my being gay was not a problem for Dr. King but a problem for the movement."[48] The juxtaposition of "action with one's body" through NVDA and "the acts of love with one's body" as a homosexual man eventually became congruent for Bayard Rustin, though they were incompatible in the minds and belief systems of the majority of civil rights workers of the 1960's.

In an interview with Joseph Beam, called "Brother To Brother", Rustin discussed why he never tried to add sexual orientation to the Civil Rights Movement. He felt that in some cases, various social movements could not easily "wed" multiple purposes. Instead of blending such movements as the Civil

Rights and Gay Rights Movements, Rustin felt that individuals should join multiple movements in order to help in the broader advancement of freedom for all people. Rustin's advice was to fight for one's own rights which proved one was serious about justice. He also felt it was vitally important to broaden one's commitment to equality and justice for all humanity. Rustin believed that every closeted gay person was a threat to the freedom of all gays because unless one was actively fighting against homophobia, then one was complicit in allowing homophobia and ignorance to continue. [49]

Rustin believed the prejudice toward the gay community was deeper than prejudice toward the black community. Those who opposed gays, according to Rustin, did so with propaganda that was designed to create fear regarding the security of family, society and traditional values. Those who opposed homosexuals also used the Hebrew texts and New Testament of the Bible to justify their behavior against all homosexuals.[50] Only the most zealous racists still use the Bible to justify their feelings of racism toward African Americans, while religious homophobia is still rampant, with entire denominations actively calling for the repentance of gays to "leave their sinful lifestyle".[51]

Spirituality and the Man

> The major aspect of the struggle within is determined without. If one gets out and begins to defend one's rights and the rights of others, spiritual growth takes place. One becomes in the process of doing, in the purifying process of action. The proof that one truly believes is in action.[52]

According to Walter Naegle, Rustin's partner for the final decade of Rustin's life,

> Bayard's spiritual life was rooted in his early childhood, as he was

> particularly influenced by his grandmother. The philosophy of the Quaker faith, which Julia Rustin practiced, was taught to Bayard early on. These teachings influenced him and found their way into his speeches and writings. In time, Bayard became less of a "practicing Quaker" and developed a more ecumenical outlook. Bayard held to the Quaker beliefs of silent worship, bearing simple witness to injustice, speaking truth to power and the oneness of the human family that were constant anchors that he returned to over and over again throughout his life. As a thoughtful person, as a man who thought a great deal, Bayard would often sit in silence and meditate, although I do not think Bayard subscribed to a particular style of meditation. Bayard enjoyed listening to classical music, especially Bach, with music seeming to nourish his spirit. Because Bayard was a great visual observer, I also believe that his deep appreciation for beauty also lifted his spirits and inspired him. [53]

Rustin maintained certain disciplines that afforded him emotional and spiritual strength, according to Naegle. Rustin was a copious reader and would read volumes of literature on nonviolence, religious philosophy and Gandhi. Rustin would read particular passages of the Bible for help when he struggled with particular issues. Rustin's spiritual and philosophical upbringing prepared him for his life's work. His spirituality was rooted in a simple faith that had less ritual or talk about the hereafter. His faith called for social witness and action.

Rustin's spirituality was also evident in where he worked because he spent much of his life working on behalf of religious-based social protest groups. During the early years of his work, Rustin was very spiritually rooted in his early days at FOR. And although this organization's position has broadened in recent years, in the 1940s, FOR was very much rooted in Christian theology. Rustin's writings, including his letter to his draft board, reflect that spiritual influence. The titles of some of his talks also reflected the nature of the organization. From 1947 to 1952, Bayard traveled first to India and then to Africa representing FOR

and explored the nonviolent dimensions of the Indian and Ghanaian independence movements.[54]

Rustin was also a collector of iconographic art. His collection of religious European art began in the late 1940s, when he traveled to Europe for FOR. Leon Medina, a friend and an antique dealer in Greenwich Village, agreed to select items while in Europe that Rustin would purchase. Rustin spent time in Medina's shop and credited much of his knowledge of antiques to things he learned there. Much of the art that he was interested in was religious in nature. Naegle commented that although he could not say definitively, he felt that Rustin's collection of art was connected to his spirituality.[55]

Conclusion

Bayard Rustin died as he lived: seeking human rights for oppressed people for the last time in 1987. Rustin, representing Fellowship House, went to Haiti in July to study the feasibility of democratic elections. Walter Naegle, Rustin's life partner of ten years and administrative assistant, joined him for a portion of the trip.

When both Rustin and Naegle returned to New York, Rustin thought he might have dysentery or a stomach bug. After two rounds of medication, Rustin finally entered Lenox Hill Hospital for exploratory surgery and was diagnosed with a perforated appendix. On August 23, he appeared to be progressing, until he began to complain of chest pains and went into cardiac arrest. In the early morning hours on August 24, 1987, one of the most influential leaders of the Civil

Rights Movement was gone.[56]

Following Bayard Rustin's unexpected death at the age of seventy-five, Vernon Jordan, director of the National Urban League (NUL) commented:

> His lifetime devotion to the cause of Civil Rights and human rights invokes the words of Oliver Wendell Holmes: "life is action and passion; it is required of a man to share the action and passion of his time or risk being judged not to have lived". Bayard Rustin truly lived.[57]

Notes

1. John D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 494.

2. Jerald Podair, *Bayard Rustin: American Dreamer* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 133.

3. D'Emilio, 419.

4. Walter Naegle, e-mail message to the author, August 18, 2008.

5. J. William Frost, "Society of Friends - Quakers: General Information," Society of Friends - Quakers, http://www.mb-soft.com/believe/txc/quakers.htm (accessed August 19, 2008). Historically, The Society of Friends (formally called Religious Society of Friends) is the moniker for a body of Christians more commonly called Quakers. The fundamental belief is "that divine revelation is immediate and individual; all persons may perceive the word of God in their soul, and Friends endeavor to heed it."

6. D'Emilio, 9.

7. Buzz Haughton, "Bayard Rustin: Civil Rights Leader," QuakerInfo, http://www.quakerinfo.com/quak_br.shtml (accessed August 19, 2008).

8. David Levine, *Bayard Rustin and the Civil Rights Movement*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 10.

9. D'Emilio, 11.

10. Levine, 14.

11. The Bayard Rustin High School Website: "About School: History," West Chester Area School District, https://www.edline.net/pages/Rustin_High_School/_zdesign/menubar/ABOUT_SCHOOL/History (accessed January 26, 2010).

12. Buzz Haughton, "Bayard Rustin: Civil Rights Leader," QuakerInfo, http://www.quakerinfo.com/quak_br.shtml (accessed August 19, 2008).

13. Levine, 28.

14. Ibid., 25.

15. Krishnalal Shridharani, *War without Violence: A Study of Gandhi's Method and Its Accomplishments* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1972), 3.

16. Levine, 26.

17. Devon W. Carbado and Donald Weise, eds., *Time on Two Crosses: The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin* (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2003), xvi.

18. Jervis Anderson, *Troubles I've Seen*, (New York City: Harpers Collins, 1997), 19.

19. D'Emilio, 205.

20. *Brother Outsider: The Life of Bayard Rustin*, DVD (Nancy D. Kates and Bennett Singer, 2002).

21. Levine, 27.

22. Carbado and Weise, 14.

23. Ibid., 15.

24. The Soulforce Website, "2010 Equality Ride," Soulforce, Inc., http://www.soulforce.org/equalityride (accessed January 26, 2010).

25. D'Emilio, 184.

26. Ibid., 193.

27. *Brother Outsider: The Life of Bayard Rustin*, DVD (Nancy D. Kates and Bennett Singer, 2002).

28. Calvin Craig Miller, *No Easy Answers: Bayard Rustin and the Civil Rights Movement* (Greensboro, NC: Morgan Reynolds Publishing, 2005), 105.

29. Anderson, 19.

30. D'Emilio, 227.

31. Walter Naegle, "Brother Outsider: A Closer Look at Bayard Rustin," Bayard Rustin Film Project, http://rustin.org/?page_id=11 (accessed August 19, 2008).

32. Carbado and Weise, 58.

33. Ibid., 60.

34. Ibid., 61.

35. Ibid., xxiv.

36. The AFL-CIO Website, "Bayard Rustin: 1912-1987", American Federation of Labor – Congress of Industrial Organizations, http://www.aflcio.org/aboutus/history/history/rustin.cfm (accessed August 19. 2008).

37. Levine, 134.

38. The AFL-CIO Website, "Bayard Rustin: 1912-1987", American Federation of Labor – Congress of Industrial Organizations, http://www.aflcio.org/aboutus/history/history/rustin.cfm (accessed August 19. 2008).

39. The A. Philip Randolph Institute Website, "Biographical Notes on Bayard Rustin", A. Philip Randolph Institute, http://www.apri.org/ht/d/sp/i/227/pid/227 (accessed August 18, 2008).

40. Podair, 86.

41. Integrationists and separatists espoused divergent views regarding the ideology and strategy for gaining equality. Integrationists seek equality by being a part of the larger society, with some advocating full assimilation. Rustin, an integrationist, believed that African Americans had to build coalitions and seek both racial and economic justice. Separatists, on the other hand, rejected coalitions and championed Black power and cultural radicalism.

42. Podair, 87.

43. Ibid., 95.

44. Carbado and Weise, xii.

45. Ibid., 283.

46. Levine, 75.

47. Ibid., 74.

48. Carbado and Weise, 292.

49. Ibid., 278.

50. Ibid., 290.

51. Ibid., 291.

52. Anderson, viii.

53. Walter Naegle, email message to the author, August 18, 2008.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid.

56. Buzz Haughton, “Bayard Rustin: Civil Rights Leader,” QuakerInfo, http://www.quakerinfo.com/quak_br.shtml (accessed August 19, 2008).

57. Carbado and Weise, xl.

Chapter Three

Rev. Troy D. Perry, Jr.: The Journey of a Prophet

> Life is a journey. We are all on our separate paths which weave and wind together. We would be lost without luminaries on the way. Troy (Perry) has been one not only in what he said and did but simply by being who he is. He gave hope, light, and life, and we thank God for him and all he has meant to those who have known and loved him.[1]
>
> ~Desmond M. Tutu

Introduction

Eldest Southern son of a bootlegger, self-proclaimed momma's boy, ordained Baptist preacher, defrocked Pentecostal minister, solider in the United States Army, homosexual, adherent of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and his strategic use of nonviolent direct action, founder of Metropolitan Community Church, prophetic voice, social activist and spiritual luminary. These are just a few descriptors of Rev. Troy D. Perry, Jr.

With an evangelical Protestantism as his religious foundation, Perry rose above what his churches of origin taught about God, Jesus Christ, the Bible and homosexuality. For nearly seven decades, Troy Perry has been on a spiritual journey with a God of love and inclusion.

Rev. Troy D. Perry experienced the love of God early in life because of the people he called family. Perry's family included his extended family of origin, community members who loved and accepted him and his family of choice, a term often used in the homosexual community that includes close friends, lovers and like minded people. He answered a call to the ministry as a young teen. Little did he know that by saying yes to God, he was also saying yes to a new

way of relating to God and God's people. Perry's spiritual evolution and inclusive view of God caused him to be one of the earliest spiritual voices for GLBT equality. Rev. Troy Perry's ongoing commitment to sexual and spiritual equality for the GLBT community has been a catalyst for change among religious, political and social leaders. Perry's life and activism forced leaders to wrestle with what it meant for GLBT individuals to be treated with dignity and respect. Rev. Troy D. Perry illuminated a path toward a more just society for GLBT people.

The Beginning of the Journey

Troy D. Perry, Jr., born July 27, 1940, is the eldest of five sons to parents, Edith and Troy Perry, Sr. Because his parents had a special and loving relationship, Perry's family offered him unconditional love and warmth.[2]

During Perry's early years, his hometown of Tallahassee was a more progressive town than other Southern cities. Perry recalled that the city was a "live and let live" kind of place. He particularly remembered that Tallahassee did not have the racial riots that were so common in the Southern United States, and in Florida cities like Fort Lauderdale and Miami. When the Southern states were ordered to integrate the public schools, the state of Florida compiled without federal force.[3] As a young boy, he was taught to respect both men and women and was expected to address his elders, regardless of race, with proper forms of "m'am and sir".[4]

In June 1952, when Troy Perry was not quite twelve years old, his father was killed in a car wreck following a high speed chase. The death of his father

raised questions about what the local police did and why they fired at the car during the chase. Although the senior Perry was not transporting liquor or anything illegal, the police either did not know that or did not care. During the high speed chase, the car flipped over, caught fire and Perry's dad and cousin were burned alive. His father was tragically taken from a family who desperately loved and needed him.[5]

Following the death of Troy Perry, Sr., a revealing testament to the racial views of the Perry family was given. The decision was made to allow Negroes to come into the funeral home to pay their respects. In the segregated South during the 1950's, Negroes were not allowed to enter a white funeral home, but because Troy Perry, Sr. rented houses to Negroes; employed a large number of Negroes; and considered a number of the Negroes as part of his family, Edith Perry insisted that the funeral home be open to all people who wanted to "pay their respects" to her husband. Although the funeral remained an "all-white affair", Negroes did attend the graveside service.[6]

Following the death of Troy Perry, Sr., the family he left behind was devastated and grief stricken. Six months after her husband's death, Edith Allen Perry married Bob Martin. Martin was not a father figure for any of the Perry children because whenever Martin drank he became cruel and would often mistreat Perry and his brothers. Troy Perry dropped out of school and ran away from home after being sexually molested by one of Martin's friends and because he feared for his life. He lived with relatives in South Georgia and then in Texas

until his mother divorced Bob Martin. Eventually, Perry returned to be with his mother and brothers in Central Florida.

Even during this difficult time in Troy Perry's life, he found God in new ways. While Perry lived with shirt tail relatives[7] in Southern Georgia, he attended a Pentecostal, a Church of God and a Free Holiness Church.[8] One of Perry's favorite aunts, Lizzy Smith, was the first person to prophesize about his calling to preach. After a short time in Georgia, Perry moved to El Paso, Texas where he returned to school and became involved in the Pentecostal, Assemblies of God and Baptist churches. Perry's exposure to these various Christian churches created a spiritual worldview that allowed for a multiplicity of denominations without one denomination being "right" while other denominations "wrong".[9] During this time, Perry was licensed to preach by a Baptist church.[10]

Troy Perry knew he was called to preach. He knew he loved God. He also had a third truth that was on a collision course with his conservative, Evangelical religious upbringing. Perry knew from an early age that he was attracted to other men. He had experienced sexual relations with another boy at the age of nine; as a preteen and then as a young adult. Yet, Perry was not sure how to express his sexual feelings toward other males and still fulfill his call as a Christian minister. Everything he had been taught in church about homosexuality defined it as sinful, an abomination and of the devil.

In order to follow God, Perry believed that he needed to suppress his sexual feelings for other men, find a young woman to fall in love with and marry.

Troy Perry and Pearl Pinion, a pastor's daughter, were married in 1959. At age nineteen, Perry along with wife and their first child moved to Illinois so Perry could attend Bible school. Perry pastored several churches while attending school. While in Illinois, rumors surfaced about his sexuality and each time, he was asked to leave the congregation.

In 1962, Perry's secular employer transferred him to Southern California. By this time, the Perry's had two children, Troy III and James Michael. He became a pastor at a church in Santa Ana. When the denominational leaders suspected that Perry was a homosexual, they removed him as pastor and had little communication with the local congregation as to why Perry was no longer their pastor. As Perry moved closer to accepting himself as a homosexual man, he knew his ministry would change. He also realized that his marriage would end. In 1964, Troy Perry, Jr. separated from his wife and came out to himself and others as a homosexual.[11]

The Journey toward Wholeness

After Perry came out, and although he missed his sons, he never looked back on his former way of life. Perry set out to better understand himself and his new community. A year after coming out, Troy received a draft notice and entered the United States Army. Perry met with military leaders several times and told them that he was homosexual. No one believed him, so in 1965 Perry was drafted into the military.[12] Perry completed boot camp and was stationed in Germany.

Perry's best friend in the army was Teddy Cobb, an African American Episcopalian from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.[13] The United States military in the 1960's was integrated, although the country was not. The United States military had started its integration in 1948, following an executive order by President Harry S. Truman. On July 26, 1948, President Truman signed Executive Order 9981, which stated, "It is hereby declared to be the policy of the President that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin."[14] The order put the armed forces at forefront of the race issues in America.

In 1967, Perry was honorably discharged from the United States Army and returned to Los Angeles. After returning to civilian life, Perry reentered the gay scene, met a young man and fell in love. The relationship ended badly after only six months. The break up left Perry depressed and hopeless. At one of the lowest points of his life, he thought suicide would be a way to end his emotional pain.[15] While he was in the hospital for his suicide attempt an unnamed African American woman, along with a doctor, spoke words that awakened Perry to a forgotten reality that people and God cared for him. In his forlorn state, Troy Perry was receptive to the reality of God again.[16] This truth reignited Perry's spiritual course that he had been called to years earlier. As he recovered from his injuries, thoughts flooded his mind and numerous people gave the same advice. Perry needed to reconcile his call to ministry with his sexuality.[17]

> ***Willie Smith***: God loves you! Listen, Troy, you are a homosexual. You will always be a homosexual until the day you die. God knows that you

> are a homosexual. God made you the way you are and God loves you! Nothing you or I can do will change it![18]
>
> ***Teddy Cobb***: Troy, how can you bear attending a church where homosexuals not only were not welcome, but were condemned? Why don't you start a "church of your own" once you return stateside?[19]
>
> ***Edith Perry***: Well, Troy, you've always been trying to be a preacher, even with all the problems. If this (starting a church) will make you happy, have a try at it.[20]

Equally important during this time, Perry sensed God was directing him with this insight: "Troy, do not tell me what I can and cannot do. I love you. You are my son. I do not have stepdaughters or stepsons!"[21]

The final push to start a church for the homosexual community came after a young man that Perry had dated was arrested for being in a gay bar. The despair of this young man sent Perry to God in prayer, asking when he should start a Christian church that served the needs of the homosexual community. The short answer was, "Start the church NOW!"[22] Finally, Rev. Troy D. Perry, Jr. had stepped into the ministry he had been preparing for all his life - a ministry among God's GLBT sons and daughters.

The Journey of a Prophet and Preacher

> ***Nancy Wilson***: Troy Perry believes that MCC, the church movement that started in his home, is in every way, completely, the Church of Jesus Christ: a Christ who is so much more inclusive than the church historically ever imagined, who identifies with those on the margins, and who, through us, works tirelessly for justice.[23]

The UFMCC has been called a post-denominational church that has all the marks of a fresh embodiment of a "church".[24] Perry made immediate plans to start a church "for all who are outcast."[25] At that time, in 1968, practically every

Christian church and denomination preached that homosexuals were mentally ill, abominations before God, sexual perverts and deserving of punishment and excommunication. In addition to changing the theological discourse concerning homosexuality and spirituality, Perry had to convince members of the GLBT community that a church was needed. Perry faced opposition not only from the religious groups that did not believe one could be homosexual and Christian, but also from the GLBT community that had turned away from organized religion. Even with the challenges, Perry would not be deterred from his commitment to God's call to begin this new church, which would be for anyone who believed in the love, forgiveness and peace of God.

The first service was in West Hollywood, California on Sunday, October 6, 1968 in the living room of Willie Smith and Troy Perry's home. The service attracted a total of twelve people, nine friends and three strangers. Beginning at this first meeting, Perry preached a Gospel of salvation, community and Christian social justice. Perry knew from the outset that MCC would merge spirituality and social activism on behalf of the GLBT community. Troy Perry gave voice and visibility to the larger society[26] as the religious face of UFMCC and the Gay Liberation Movement.

The Prophet and a Larger Audience

As an open homosexual, Christian clergyperson, Troy Perry was in the vanguard of leaders that spoke out against the blatant homophobia of police, city officials, society in general and religious leaders in particular. Perry not only

fought for homosexual rights locally, but he also traveled throughout the United States to give a new Christian viewpoint to elected officials, heterosexuals and even to closeted homosexuals.

One such example of a national battle against homophobia came in the late 1970's. In 1977, the Gay Liberation Movement faced the ire of religious people in Florida because of the homophobic rhetoric of a vocal minority, led by Anita Bryant. The antigay campaign began when Dade County Commissioners voted to protect homosexuals against discrimination in housing, employment and public accommodations.[27] The fight for equality was hard fought and the leaders of the Gay Rights Movement were ill equipped and refused to address the fear based religious rhetoric. In the end, seventy percent of Floridians voted against ending discrimination for homosexuals.[28]

Following the demoralizing defeat in Florida, similar antigay legislation surfaced and passed in Wichita, Kansas; Saint Paul, Minnesota[29] and Eugene, Oregon. Following these four political defeats, the Gay Liberation Movement had an unexpected challenge in California with Proposition 6, also called the Briggs Initiative, which targeted school teachers who were suspected homosexuals.[30] Proposition 6 was proposed by Senator John Briggs as a political maneuver to better his position in his campaign to be the next governor of California.[31]

The leaders of the Gay Liberation Movement, which included Perry, met to discuss ways to defeat Senator Briggs and Proposition 6. After several meetings to evaluate what went wrong in the previous defeats, many of the leaders felt that

Proposition 6 could not be defeated. Perry, however, did not agree. Following self-analysis of the political and homosexual landscape, Perry turned to God to reaffirm the value and validity of Christian social action.[32]

According to the story, "Troy's angel" revealed to him the moral battle that was to be waged against this most immoral initiative.[33] Perry began a fast that lasted until the community raised $100,000 to fight Proposition 6. The fast lasted sixteen days on the steps of the Federal Building in Los Angeles. During the fast in September 1977, a group of handpicked gay leaders from California came together and formed "Concerned Voters of California" with dual offices in Los Angeles and San Francisco.[34]

Key strategies that Perry and this group used included:
1. Gathered groups had to be in harmony to operate efficiently
2. No radical gay groups were to be included
3. The group would operate as a non-partisan political group
4. The group would conduct a campaign of education, through various media outlets
5. The group would include attorneys and those in positions of power to further the purpose of defeating Prop 6[35]

Campaign consultants were used; monies were spent to gain insights and advantages into fighting Proposition 6. Though there were disagreements within the leadership, they continued to raise money and speak to the media.

Surprisingly, support came from political conservatives like Ronald Reagan.[36] Democratic Governor Jerry Brown encouraged then President Jimmy Carter to come out against Proposition 6, which Carter did. In a rally during the final week before the November election, President Carter encouraged people to "Vote No on Proposition Six!"[37]

In the end, 56.8% of the voters in California voted "No" on Proposition 6. Perry's leadership helped to make the difference and this victory validated the truth that when leaders of the Gay Liberation Movement organized and did not back down, they could be successful.[38]

The Journey, the Prophet and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Troy Perry became a gay man of conviction during the apex of the Civil Rights Movement and was enthralled with the life, ministry and strategies of another Southern clergy person, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. According to Perry, he had a deep love for Dr. King and his beliefs. As a twenty year old, some eight years before UFMCC was formed, Perry watched what Dr. King accomplished with the African American community and was amazed that King defended and persuaded one of the most despised and marginalized groups in the United States to fight the predominantly white majority to change laws. He was amazed how Dr. King and those within the Civil Rights Movement successfully demonstrated, used the court system, Congress and State legislatures to make a difference for the African American community. Dr. King and the Civil Rights Movement inspired Perry to believe that the GLBT community could use the same tactics to make a difference within their community. While in the United States Army, Perry spent endless hours discussing Dr. King's vision with his best friend, Teddy Cobb. Because many of Perry's best friends in the military were African American, he also came to terms with his solidarity with the Civil Rights Movement.[39]

As a Christian activist, Perry said that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. became "his mirror". Perry continually looked to King for insights into movement strategies. Of particular interest was Dr. King's two pronged approach (1) demonstrate in the streets and (2) take grievances to the courts.[40] Dr. King's strategy, which Perry emulated, was to raise public awareness of the unjust system while simultaneously asking the judicial system to rule in favor of the oppressed minority.

The Prophet and National Marches

Coupled with King's influential example and movement strategies, Perry knew his work would encompass a broader social and political activism. King's leadership at the 1963 March on Washington was a defining moment for Perry. Perry understood that historically, national injustices are best addressed in the nation's capital which is why masses of people have journeyed to Washington, D.C. to make their voices heard. Therefore, it seemed logical and necessary for GLBT citizens of the United States to make their own pilgrimage to the nation's capital. Perry's leadership within the Gay Rights Movement caused him to become one of the organizers for the 1979, 1993 and 2000 GLBT Marches.[41]

The 1979 March on Washington demanded: (1) a national Gay and Lesbian Civil Rights Bill; (2) repeal of existing anti-gay laws; (3) a presidential executive order banning discrimination based on sexual orientation in the military, federal and federally related entities; (4) the end of unfair bias toward gay and lesbian parents in relation to custody[42] and (5) protection of gay and

lesbian youth from discriminatory legislation.[43]

In the week leading up to the 1979 March on Washington, Troy Perry and Robin Tyler rode an Amtrak train, dubbed the "Freedom Train," from San Francisco, California to Washington, D.C., and were accompanied by one hundred forty gay men and four lesbians. Along the way, they made short speeches at every stop and during their speeches; Tyler reframed the ongoing conversation by suggesting that:

> The reason people don't want us to come out has nothing to do with what we do in bed. Ours is not a movement from the waist down! Sex is not the main part of our existence. We are fighting for the right to love.... being gay is more than a lifestyle - it is our life. The reason our enemies want to keep us in the closet is because as long as we're isolated from each other, we can't ever achieve our civil rights. The closet is the great divider. It prevents us from affirming our right to work, our right to be fairly paid and even our right to exist.[44]

Rev. Troy Perry and UFMCC were highly visible among the crowd of approximately 75,000-100,000 people gathered at the 1979 March on Washington. No tangible legal advances were made for homosexuals at the first march; however, the march did show that a large number of homosexuals could come together to demonstrate for their rights and freedom.[45]

In addition to the 1979 March on Washington for Equal Rights for Homosexuals, there have been four other Marches, in 1987, 1993, 2000 and 2009. The only Gay Rights leader to speak at all of the first four marches is Rev. Troy Perry.[46] Perry contributed the theme for the 1987 March on Washington, "For love or life, we're not going back"[47] which connected to the two-fold purpose of the 1987 March: (1) the concern for individual states taking rights away from

consenting adults and (2) the lack of federal support and funding to research HIV/AIDS.[48] The CBS television network estimated the number of people who attended this second march to be 800,000 people.[49]

The 1993 March on Washington may have been the largest demonstration in American history with an estimated number of demonstrators ranging from 300,000 to 1.1 million while some organizers touted attendance at 2 million. A key success for this March and gay rights was the endorsement by important civil rights groups such as the National Organization for Women (NOW) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).[50] Part of the platform for this march communicated that Gay Rights leaders recognized that any quest for social justice was inherently linked to fighting racism, sexism, classism, economic injustice and religious homophobia. This march openly acknowledged the diversity of the Gay Rights Movement and dared to make space for diverse groups. The overall commitment to rid society and the Gay Rights Movement of oppression and exploitation was a step toward a united gathering across racial, gender, class and religious lines within and beyond the overall movement.[51]

The 2000 Millennium March on Washington was not as popular or as well received by the GLBT community. The two original planners were the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC). Some people within the larger GLBT community were highly critical of the HRC and MCC being the only two organizations initially at the table for such an important

event. Perry was harshly criticized by people who perceived that HRC and MCC were excluding other organizations and grassroots leadership from the march.

The fifth march held on October 10th and 11th of 2009 was billed as the National Equality March in Washington, D.C and called for "Equality across America". The march was conceived by Cleve Jones, longtime activist from San Francisco, Harvey Milk protégé and founder of The NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt. The March drew between 100,000 to 200,000 people and coincided with two key events in the GLBT community, the 40th anniversary of Stonewall[52] and National Coming Out Day. Some GLBT citizens marched to protest the passage of California's Proposition 8 that repealed marriage equality in that state after only five months. The keynote speaker was Julian Bond, chairperson for the NAACP, who connected the fight for gay equality with the Black Civil Rights Movement.[53]

The Ongoing Journey of an Activist Prophet

Troy Perry remained the founding leader of UFMCC until 2003, at which time he retired as Moderator. Following Perry's retirement, UFMCC as a denomination went through a restructuring and modified its name to Metropolitan Community Church (MCC). Perry continued his commitment to social justice by fighting for marriage equality. His personal desire for marriage equality came when he legally married his partner of 20 years, Phillip DeBlieck, in Toronto, Canada on July 16, 2003. Perry and DeBlieck, along with Robin Tyler and her partner, then sued the state of California for legal recognition of their marriages.

On May 15, 2008, the California Supreme Court ruled in favor of same sex couples and marriage equality.[54] Following the Supreme Court's ruling, opponents of marriage equality introduced legislation, Proposition 8, which defined marriage as being between a man and a woman. The GLBT citizens of California and their allies fought and lost the vote for same sex marriage by a margin of two percent.

A subsequent hearing in early 2009 before the California Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of Proposition 8. Currently, same sex couples in the state of California cannot legally marry; however, the same sex marriages performed in California between May 15, 2008 and November 5, 2008 are still legal.[55]

Conclusion

Perry remains committed to marriage equality as well as all forms of broader inclusion for GLBT citizens. Perry still understands that "the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice."[56] When asked about his best advice for the current leadership of the Gay Rights Movement to move forward in reaching full equality in this generation, Perry responded,

> Keep fighting, fighting, fighting and don't stop until we've won all of our freedoms! I believe, with all of my heart that we absolutely are going to win and we just have to continue to live that out.[57]

Rev. Perry's journey has not been without its risks. When asked about his concern for personal safety in the midst of being openly gay in such a homophobic society, Perry stated,

> I learned it's a chance we must take; a chance worth taking. Take the same stride that our black brothers and sisters have taken in past years. Go on even if vicious dogs are turned loose on us like on the blacks in Alabama and the Deep South; Go on and survive and push forward. When you wake up and realize you're an oppressed person: you must first know you're a human being; you must learn that you have rights too; those rights don't mean a thing unless you're willing to fight for them.[58]

By adhering to nonviolent direct action and civil disobedience, Rev. Troy Perry followed in the footsteps of his spiritual hero: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Troy Perry was one of the first homosexual clergyperson to challenge members of the GLBT community to accept their birthrights as spiritual daughters and sons, while serving notice to mainstream denominations that the wholesale rejection of GLBT people was no longer acceptable. Rev. Troy D. Perry, though retired, still works toward his dream of full inclusion and equality for all GLBT people.

> I dream that we can all come out of hiding, that we can all stand tall and walk with our heads held high, because we are gay and we are proud. We will all know that we are God's own creatures, that God loves us.[59]

Notes

1. Chris Glaser, ed., *Troy Perry: Pastor and Prophet* (West Hollywood: Metropolitan Community Churches, 2005), 34.

2. Troy D. Perry and Thomas L.P. Swicegood, *Don't Be Afraid Anymore: The Story of Reverend Troy Perry and The Metropolitan Community Churches* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 3.

3. Ibid., 10.

4. Troy D. Perry, Jr., Telephone interview by author, February 3, 2009.

5. Troy D. Perry, *The Lord Is My Shepherd and He Knows I'm Gay*. (Los Angeles: Morris Publishing, 1997), 32.

6. Ibid., 33.

7. "Shirt tail relatives" is a term used by people in the South who were not actually related, but still considered themselves family.

8. Perry and Swicegood, 8.

9. Ibid., 12.

10. Glaser, 14.

11. Ibid., 28.

12. Perry, 99.

13. Perry and Swicegood, 26.

14. Harry S. Truman, "Executive Orders: Harry S. Truman, 1945-1953, Executive Order 9981", Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, http://www.truman library.org/9981.htm (accessed January 28, 2010).

15. Perry and Swicegood, 117.

16. Perry, 29.

17. Ibid., 30.

18. Glaser, 42.

19. Perry and Swicegood, 31.

20. Ibid., 37.

21. Glaser, 45.

22. Perry and Swicegood, 35.

23. Glaser, 15.

24. Ibid., 17.

25. Perry and Swicegood, 34.

26. Glaser, 12.

27. Perry and Swicegood, 139.

28. Ibid., 145.

29. Ibid., 146.

30. Ibid., 147.

31. Ibid., 146.

32. Ibid., 149.

33. Ibid., 150.

34. Ibid., 151.

35. Ibid., 152.

36. Ibid., 165.

37. Ibid., 173.

38. *Call Me Troy*. DVD (Tragoidia Moving Pictures, 2007).

39. Troy D. Perry, Jr., email message to author, January 29, 2009.

40. Ibid.

41. Perry and Swicegood, 189.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid., 190.

44. Ibid., 192.

45. Ibid., 195.

46. Troy D. Perry, Jr., Telephone interview by author, February 3, 2009. Troy Perry also spoke at the 2009 March on Washington, making him the only clergy person who has spoken at all five GLBT Marches on Washington.

47. Glaser, 29.

48. Perry and Swicegood, 195.

49. Ibid., 200.

50. The GLBTQ Encyclopedia on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Culture, "Marches on Washington", glbtq, Inc., http://www.glbtq.com/social-sciences/marches_washington,2.html (accessed January 28, 2010).

51. Ibid.

52. Chuck Colbert, "Equality. Now." *Between the Lines*, 1742, no. 634 (October 15, 2009). http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=1889111851&Fmt=3&clientId=30345&RQT=309&VName=PQD (accessed January 28, 2010). The Stonewall Rebellion occurred in June 1969 when patrons at gay bar in New York battled against law enforcement officials who regularly harassed homosexuals. This seminal event birthed the modern Gay Rights Movement.

53. Ibid.

54. John Dart, "The Pastor Behind the Gay Marriage Ruling,' *The Christian Century* 125, no. 12 (June 17, 2008), http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=1&hid=5&sid=0bd656bc-42f5-4b96-816b-966de017f899%40sessionmgr13&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=a9h&AN=32548089#db=a9h&AN=32548089 (accessed January 28, 2010).

55. Steven Tarlow, "California Supreme Court Upholds State's Prop 8 Decision." The Personal Money Store, http://personalmoneystore.com/moneyblog/2009/05/27/california-supreme-court/ (accessed January 21, 2010).

56. Clayborne Carson and Kris Shephard, eds., *A Call to Conscience: The Landmark Speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.* (New York: Warner Books, 2001), 116.

57. Rev. Troy D. Perry, Jr., email message to author, February 7, 2009.

58. Perry, 171.

59. Glaser, 148.

Chapter Four

Similarities and Difference of Two Movements

Introduction

The complexities and nuances of the Civil Rights and the Gay Rights Movements require careful consideration when comparing and contrasting the two movements. Rarely do important issues reach complete resolution since additional questions are usually raised. As Joseph Joubert asserted, "it is better to debate a question without settling it than to settle a question without debating it."[1] In any discussion concerning the similarities and the differences between the Civil Rights and Gay Rights Movements, one must remember there is not a simple separation of GLBT and African American issues. There is an overlap and an intersection of both race and sexual orientation. The truth of this dialogue reminds people that such an overlap exists and can shed light on the racial segregation that divides society, civil rights and GLBT rights.

Some people believe that the Civil Rights and Gay Rights Movements are different. Anti-GLBT activists claim that equal rights for GLBT people are a threat to civil rights for African Americans and other "legitimate minorities."[2] However, an analysis must address the reality of African Americans who also identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. According to the 2000 United States Census, there are nearly 85,000 African American same-sex couples that represent fourteen percent of the 600,000 same sex couples of all races.[3] Additionally, more than fifty percent of these couples are rearing children.[4] Even

though anti-gay organizations and their leaders often work to divide the African American and GLBT communities, the fact remains that a significant percentage of African Americans also self-identify as GLBT. Even with the differences that exist between the Civil Rights and Gay Right Movements; both movements call for equality for marginalized people – some who are African American and GLBT singles, couples and families. Within the complex and intersecting issues and debates of both movements, people must be valued and considered. Iconic leaders of the Civil Rights Movement, particularly Coretta Scott King and John Lewis, have expressed solidarity with members within the Gay Rights Movement.

> Homophobia is like racism and anti-Semitism and other forms of bigotry in that it seeks to dehumanize a large group of people, to deny their humanity, their dignity and personhood. This sets the stage for further repression and violence that spread all too easily to victimize the next minority group.[5]

> For many years now, I have been an outspoken supporter of civil and human rights for gay and lesbian people…Gays and lesbians stood up for civil rights in Montgomery, Selma, in Albany, Ga. and St. Augustine, Fla., and many other campaigns of the Civil Rights Movement, many of these courageous men and women were fighting for my freedom at a time when they could find few voices for their own, and I salute their contributions. [6]
>
> ~Coretta Scott King

Georgia Congressman John Lewis, one of the speakers at the 1963 March on Washington, publicly noted the strong connection between the Civil Rights and Gay Rights Movements:

> We are now at such a crossroads over same-sex couples' freedom to marry…We cannot keep turning our backs on gay and lesbian Americans. I have fought too hard and too long against discrimination based on race and color not to stand up against discrimination based on sexual orientation….Some say let's choose another route and give gay folks some legal rights but call it something other than civil rights…We have

been down that road before in this country. Separate is not equal.[7]

People both within and outside the Civil Rights Movement may dispute the similarities of their movement with the Gay Rights Movement; however, the complexities of both movements allow for divergent views, while still permitting analysis. Both the Civil Rights and Gay Rights Movements are similar when placed within the broader scope of social movements. Both movements share these basic tenets.

Social Movements

All social movements share basic tenets and similarities, such as:

1. The desire to bring the marginalized into the center of society and culture.
2. Success is measured by both resistance and backlash in the face of progress.
3. Leadership issues must be addressed.
4. Determination must be made regarding what types of change(s) are to be sought, whether constitutional, political and/or cultural.
5. The validity of single identity politics must be addressed.[8]

According to Charles Tilly, uprisings have occurred around the world for thousands of years in one form or another; however, not until the eighteenth century did people in Western Europe and North America begin to use social movements as a political tool.[9]

By the dawn of the twenty-first century, people worldwide knew that the term "social movement" meant a collective group of people and organizations that were committed to overcoming oppressive powers. Tilly believed that social movements are the key outlet used by common, ordinary people to express themselves in the political arena of the world's democracies and also in the

various areas where democracy is desired by their citizens.[10] Fundamentally, a social movement attempts to bring about fundamental improvements in the social order. The very language "social movement lends itself to the imagery of unrest and a stirring up with a collective commitment toward a stated and visualized goal."[11]

In analyzing both the Civil Rights and the Gay Rights Movements based on these five tenets, one finds similarities and differences. For example, Bayard Rustin and most of the early leadership of the Civil Rights Movement worked to bring African Americans into the center of society and culture through equal access and treatment. In the waning years of the 1960's, separatist leaders within the Civil Rights Movement rejected the validity of this strategy, which led to a splintering within the movement. The leadership of the Gay Rights Movement disagreed on the validity of this tenet with some leaders seeking the inclusion of GLBT people within society and culture, while others perceived the strength of the movement as being outside the dominant culture. The debate within the leadership of the GLBT community regarding Marriage Equality is the most recent manifestation of this ongoing ideological difference.

The second principle of analysis that measures how successful a social movement is based on the resistance and backlash in the face of progress is applicable to both the Civil Rights and Gay Rights Movement. Success in social movements comes at a price. When a gain is made, an external backlash will occur. When failures and frustrations occur internal backlash may also arise.

Knowing that backlash and setbacks will inevitably come prevents people in the movement from losing hope. The ebb and flow of victory and defeat reminds activists that victories will come, even as setbacks occur.

Another guideline for social movements addresses the issue of leadership. Leadership within a social movement is paramount because the movement's organizations and individual participants are never homogeneous. What typically unites a movement is the common relationship to an opponent. Collective identity is difficult unless there are identified and accepted movement leaders.

In the beginning of social movements, individual charismatic leaders can ensure the continuation of a strong movement; however, as the movement grows and attains a measure of success, the leadership must be broadened due to the sheer numbers of participants and organizations. Leadership is about building relationships, communicating the purpose and tactics of the movement and persuading people to action.[12] Charismatic leaders, like Dr. King, led by embodying all three aspects of leadership: relationship, communication and persuasion. More broadly defined, leadership is found within all levels of a movement. Visible leaders are not the only type of leaders as evidenced by the leadership of Rustin.

One key difference is that leadership within the Gay Rights Movement has been less pronounced than the leadership within the Civil Rights Movement. Since the 1960's, there have been key leaders for particular moments in the Gay Liberation Movement; however, overall leadership within the later Gay Rights

Movement is connected to organizations throughout the GLBT community. The leadership of this movement seems more fragmented because, when the only uniting issue is sexuality, issues of gender, socio-economics and race are often left out of the conversation.

The fourth principle that all social movements must determine is what types of change(s) are sought, whether constitutional, political and/or cultural. This principle is instrumental in determining a movement's strategy. All social movements seek certain changes in particular areas of society. The most difficult, yet most important area of change, addresses constitutional changes or interpretations at the federal level. The most successful social movements seek all three forms of change: constitutional, political and cultural. When inequality exists, it is difficult to sufficiently change the cultural norms or decrease the stigma of a particular group unless the constitutional and political aspects of change are affected. Until constitutional and/or political advances are made, changes within culture and society will be difficult, if not impossible.[13] This key similarity between the Civil Rights and Gay Rights Movement was understood by both movement's leaders and movement opponents.

The final tenet of social movements concerns the validity of single identity politics. This tenet is particularly important to both the Civil Rights and Gay Rights Movements. Successful social movements possess a primary identity; however, multiple causes may be necessary in order to give the overall movement collective strength and leverage to bring about changes on a broader

scale. Collective action brings strength to a movement and increasing the number of alliances and allies for a movement adds resources and power.

The Civil Rights Movement built coalitions within and beyond African American organizations. Rustin was a strong advocate for coalition building politics that created diverse alliances for the good of multiple groups of people. His involvement within the Civil Rights and Labor Movements connected both movements and strengthened both causes.

Similar to the Civil Rights Movement, the Gay Liberation Movement of the early 1970's partnered with the New Left Movement for a short time; however, gay leaders experienced homophobia within the movement. Jim Owles, leader of New York's Gay Activists Alliance, felt the sting of anti-gay sentiment.

> When (gay liberationists) did go out to other actions—say to a support rally for the Panthers or the Young Lords or the more radical groups--…they were still getting spit at. The word faggot was still being used at them. They were relegated to 'back' roles and were told, 'Don't come out in front!' We don't want our groups to become known as homosexual things.' That happened in other groups: in women's lib the lesbians were told, 'Get in the back. We don't want women's lib to be identified as a lesbian movement…[14]

According to Owles, this type of treatment contributed to the decision of the Gay Liberation Movement (GLM) to become a single identity movement, partly out of fear and experiences of rejection. Lesbians also moved away from gay politics and developed a separate feminist movement, which contributed to an even greater sense of single identity politics within the movement. The advantage of having lesbians in the GLM expanded the notion of sexual orientation as women verbalized the need to address issues of gender.[15]

Contrary to current beliefs, white middle class men within the GLM did experiment with broader social justice politics. Some gay men advocated for multi-racial, multi-issue politics within the GLM; [16] however, the rapid decline of the more aggressive elements of the movement caused the issues of race, class and gender to be separated from the overall issue of sexual liberation. A window of opportunity for coalition politics within the GLM opened but closed before a solid formation could be created by leaders and organizations.

Similarities between the Two Movements

The basic tenets of social movements are found in both the Civil Rights and Gay Rights Movements. In addition to these broad similarities, some GLBT activists in the 1980's began to compare their movement with the Civil Rights Movement. Some activists believed that "civil rights" was a phrase that should include ethnic groups and women, as well as people with a different sexual orientation. Rustin adopted this approach and spoke about how he thought the Gay Rights Movement did, indeed, parallel the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's.[17] Although Rustin was not active in the overall Gay Rights Movement, he did give speeches and grant interviews, at the urging of his life partner, Walter Naegle. In the final decade of Rustin's life, he comfortably embodied the duality of race and sexual orientation. Rustin was uniquely positioned to draw insights and lessons from both social movements. He drew parallels between Rosa Parks when she refused to give up her seat on a bus in 1955 and the subsequent Montgomery Bus Protest with the 1969 Stonewall Bar incident where drag

queens and other homosexuals stood up to police harassment. In both cases, protests occurred because people began to fight for their rights to be treated with respect and dignity. Both protests embodied the right to be protected from an abusive authority.[18]

When interviewed concerning the similarities between the Civil Rights Movement and the Gay Rights Movement, Perry noted several similarities. According to Perry, one reality shared by both movements is that "oppression is oppression, regardless of the basis given by the oppressors." Whether a person is being oppressed because of race or sexual orientation, the person is unable to live to one's full potential within society. Perry believed that both movements are about overcoming oppression.[19] Connected to this opinion is that regardless of the issue or movement, all people deserve to be treated with respect and dignity.[20] People who disagree with this analysis level the same arguments against GLBT people as they did against African Americans when they were denied equality. Like Perry, Rustin believed the primary parallel between the Civil Rights and Gay Rights Movements was a moral one: the fight for human rights and equality.[21]

Rustin grew to understand the importance of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender (GLBT) people being able to reject the hatred of their oppressors. According to Rustin, the GLBT community, like African Americans and other despised groups, has four issues that must be addressed if the movement is to succeed. Rustin believed that GLBT people must overcome fear, self-hatred and

self-denial. The last, and ongoing obstacle, is political. He believed that GLBT people had to realize that as a marginalized group, their task was not to change the minds of extremists who would never accept them; rather, they needed to create the kind of America where legal, moral and psychological defenses are used to prevent openly homophobic manifestations of hate toward the GLBT community. Rustin felt the primary duty of the GLBT community was to control the extent to which people could publicly manifest anti-gay attitudes and actions.[22]

Both Perry and Rustin believed that African Americans and members of the GLBT community needed to realize that "the oppressed must be their own heroes."[23] All social movements have allies and supporters that call for equality and justice for the marginalized group; however, those who are most directly affected by the injustice must take a stand for themselves and their rights. Rustin never understood how any GLBT person could be prejudiced toward another marginalized person or group. He held the fundamental belief that being a GLBT person and being prejudice was incompatible. He also believed that individual people should not only organize and work for their own interests, but they should also join groups and movements to fight for the freedom and rights of others.[24] Rustin felt that the most important thing that GLBT or African American activists could do was build strong coalitions to eliminate all types of injustice. By working collectively, marginalized groups could then create a larger force from which to win human and civil rights for all marginalized people.[25]

Rustin connected the two movements while speaking to the Philadelphia chapter of Black and White Men Together on March 1, 1986. He noted that African Americans were no longer the litmus test or barometer for proper social change. According to Rustin, "the new niggers (sic) are gays". He felt that the question to ask when it came to judging people regarding democratic rights or basic human rights was, "what about gay people?"[26] He surmised that the barometer for social change was measured by selecting the group of people which was most mistreated. Rustin went on to say that he believed that because of "the vanguard social status of gay identity, the gay movement had a unique social responsibility to the world."[27] This status afforded the GLBT community a central position to further progress toward democracy.

Another reality for both the Civil Rights and Gay Rights Movement was found in leadership. Although a broad coalition of leaders is found in both movements an overlooked similarity is the value of having people of faith in key leadership roles. Dr. King's spiritual leadership was fundamental to the overall success of the Civil Rights Movement. And although Rustin did not solely identify as a religious leader of the Civil Rights Movement, his Quaker upbringing deeply influenced his leadership. Similarly, Rev. Perry and his spirituality played an important role in the early Gay Liberation Movement. Both the Civil Rights and Gay Rights Movements still need Christian clergy advocating for the rights of the members of their marginalized group. The need for Christian clergy within the movements is important because some of the greatest resistance to

extending rights to marginalized groups frequently comes from fundamentalist Christian clergy and denominations.

Another similarity that connects the spiritual leadership of both movements is to be found in the personalities and tactics of King, Rustin and Perry. King and Perry used their connection to God and personal spiritual disciplines to guide them as they served as spiritual leaders within their respective movements. Both men employed prayer and fasting. King was influenced by Rustin's use of NVDA. King and Perry led their respective movements to employ the tactics of NVDA to bring about desired change. All three men were arrested for their NVDA acts of civil disobedience. Because Dr. King was "a mirror" for Perry, the similarities in the Civil Rights Movement and its spiritual tactics are related to how Perry employed the actions of Dr. King in the Gay Rights Movement. Dr. King's call to "use our bodies, use our hands, use our feet and use our voices as tools to help build the Beloved Community"[28] had a profound influence on Perry's commitment to social justice and equality for GLBT people.

Differences between the Two Movements

Distinct differences exist between the Civil Rights and Gay Rights Movements. In contrasting these movements, Rustin noted:

> The gay movement is much simpler; it only seems harder. The homosexual struggle is only to fight prejudice under the law. It does not require billions of dollars of an economic program....gays and lesbians as a group are not economically disadvantaged, the gay rights struggle was for symbolic, not substantive, equality...and though meaningful differences existed between the gay rights and the black civil rights movements, the two (movements) were deeply connected.[29]

Rustin illustrated other differences between the two movements. Members of the GLBT community are less homogenous in appearance and in their expressions of identity; whereas, the African American community is perceived as looking the same and having more realities and life experiences in common. African Americans were also denied educational access that has not been endured by most of the GLBT community.[30]

When asked via email and then in a follow up phone interview about the differences between the Civil Rights and Gay Rights Movements, Perry echoed Rustin's insights regarding the differences. Both Rustin and Perry pointed to the reality that a majority of GLBT people or their ancestors have never been slaves. Non-African American GLBT people have never been sold and traded as property to support the economic status quo of the United States, whereas, African American GLBT people hold this injustice as part of their history. The pain of slavery is a reality that few non-African American GLBT people comprehend. Ancestors of African Americans have been slaves and in some parts of the United States were still being treated like slaves in the 1960's.[31]

A second difference between the two movements is the issue of coloration. Most African Americans cannot hide their identity because the first identifying marker of a person is skin color. African Americans cannot hide and are still sometimes judged by the color of their skin. GLBT people can usually pass or hide if they want or choose to pass as heterosexual. Only a small percentage of the GLBT community cannot hide due to physical appearance,

mannerisms, etc. If GLBT people are concerned about being fired for being homosexual, they can opt to stay in the closet. African Americans usually do not have the option "to not present as black". [32] African Americans who are also GLBT carry a double burden of marginalization. Although GLBT people can choose to pass as heterosexual, Rustin felt unequivocally that, "the gay community has a moral obligation…to do whatever is possible to encourage more and more gays to come out of the closet."[33] Connected to the issue of coloration is the issue of choice. People who oppose the comparison of Gay Rights to the Civil Rights Movement state that being Black is not a choice; whereas, being homosexual is a choice that can be changed. Members of the GLBT community bristle at this argument since many GLBT people believe that sexual orientation is not a choice.

Another difference, according to Perry, is that African Americans had the advantage of having previous generations of African Americans as mentors and role models on how to act in their struggle for freedom. Younger African Americans usually live among their family members who can teach them about the history and the importance of the Civil Rights Movement. African Americans also have each other for mutual support; for mentoring and for ongoing education. Conversely, Perry believes GLBT people are just beginning to gain a communal awareness of the Gay Rights Movement because an overwhelming percentage of GLBT youth are being reared by heterosexual parents in predominantly heterosexual families and communities. Fortunately for GLBT

youth, contemporary scholars have begun to uncover stories of the struggle of GLBT people from past generations. Primarily, GLBT people have learned about the Gay Rights Movement and various stories through books and more recently through television, internet and other media outlets. According to Perry, stories about the GLBT community are finally being told so that GLBT youth can more readily find themselves in society and not fear isolation.[34]

A final variation, though small, offers an insight into just how closeted the homosexuals of the last 1960's were. In the early days of UFMCC and the Gay Liberation Movement, most homosexuals did not use their real names within a gay setting or among gay people because of rampant homophobia and the persecution of known homosexuals. Perry did not know to use a pseudonym when he started UFMCC, nor has he ever used one. African Americans, as a general rule, did not use pseudonyms during the Civil Rights Movement.[35]

Leadership Strategies

The leadership ingenuity of Rustin, King and Perry was that they understood the value and necessity of a multi-pronged approach in gaining equality for marginalized groups within their respective movements.

Although their lives overlapped from 1940 to 1987, Bayard Rustin and Troy Perry never met. Perry learned of Rustin's influence on Dr. King within the past twenty years, which may reflect how marginalized Rustin was during his life. Rustin's leadership strategies directly influenced and benefited Perry and the Gay Rights Movement since he championed the leadership and lifestyle

strategy of NVDA as a means to bring about needed social change. Rustin's introduction of NVDA to King gave the emerging Civil Rights Movement a practical strategy and a powerful moral force that empowered African Americans to overcome a century of political and social oppression.[36]

In analyzing the Civil Rights Movement, it does appear that this movement created the social conditions and the political strategies that made the later Gay Rights Movement possible.[37] Specifically, King's adoption of Rustin's NVDA provided a touchstone for Perry as he utilized strategies that would benefit the nascent Gay Rights Movement. Rustin first influenced King's movement strategy which then influenced Perry's movement strategy.

Whether Bayard Rustin was speaking about the Civil Rights of African Americans or Gay Americans, he espoused the principles of nonviolence. He challenged activists to behave in a nonviolent manner; to act without fear; to speak quietly yet firmly; to show consideration for police, bus drivers and all in authority. These were the lessons that Rustin felt would benefit GLBT activists as well as African American activists.[38] Rustin taught the most valuable weapon against injustice and discrimination was for members of marginalized groups to develop a deep inner security, for in that security resided a fearless and most decent human being.[39] When Rustin and Perry used NVDA, their goal was to gain the respect and sympathy of the other party and the general public, and achieve tangible progress.[40]

A second leadership strategy used in both the Civil Rights and Gay Rights

Movements was the use of public transportation to raise awareness and to educate the public regarding the unequal treatment of African American and GLBT people. Rustin's participation, along with other young African American and white activists, in the Journey of Reconciliation sought to desegregate buses in the upper South through NVDA.[41]

Perry's "Freedom Train Ride" in October 1979 was safer than Rustin's 1947 Journey of Reconciliation. The Freedom Ride, which lasted four days on an Amtrak train, traveled from San Francisco to the 1979 March on Washington. This train ride was the first strategic tour to educate non-GLBT people on the everyday lives of GLBT people, while offering a positive outlet to GLBT people both on the ride and in the small cities along the route. Attitudes of non-gays were changed as a result of the daily interaction with the GLBT riders.[42]

Beginning in the spring of 2006, MCC Clergy person and founder of Soulforce, Rev. Mel White reprised the strategy of Rustin's Journey of Reconciliation to create Soulforce's Equality Rides. Young GLBT adults committed to a two month tour of colleges and universities that forbade the inclusion of openly GLBT students. The goal of the Equality Ride was to change the hearts and minds of people regarding GLBT equality.[43]

Rev. Gilbert H. Caldwell, longtime Civil Rights activist and retired United Methodist minister, endorsed the 2008 Equality Ride by reminding African American and GLBT people that,

> Today, those who see no relationship between racism and heterosexism are making the same mistake that those who criticized Dr. King and his

> resistance to the war in Vietnam. "None of us are free until all of us free". May your efforts stimulate conversation where there has been none, encourage African American Gay persons who have experienced discrimination within their own communities and institutions because of their sexual orientation, and challenge those who do not condone the "n" word when used against African Americans but who use the "f" word when speaking of Gay persons and see no contradiction in their use of that word.[44]

Another shared tactic was the most well known: Marches on Washington. Rustin's work on the 1963 March on Washington brought together a broad coalition of people and organizations who desired legal, social and economic equality for African Americans. Some credit the 1963 March for quickening the passage of the Civil and Voting Rights Acts. Most historians think that the shocking photos of African Americans being attacked by police dogs in Birmingham, Alabama and the horror suffered by African American and white university students in Mississippi did more to gain support for the bills than the March on Washington.[45]

Like King and Rustin, Perry saw the value and importance of taking the grievances of the GLBT community to the nation's capital to publicly demonstrate against inequities.[46] Visible demonstrations were tangible signs within and beyond any social movement that the needs of marginalized citizens were not being addressed by society. Public demonstrations, not only in Washington, D.C., but throughout America have continued to be used as strategies in the fight for both African Americans and GLBT people.

Perry's "Freedom Train" delivered him to the first GLBT March on Washington. The 1979 March called for a Gay Rights Bill, which was never

passed. The primary success of the 1979 March was a psychological one for the GLBT community, for it showed a large, vocal number of GLBT people could demonstrate for their freedom and equality. [47] The Gay Rights Movement continued to use Marches on Washington for visibility of their causes as recently as October 2009. There is an ongoing debate among GLBT activists and members of the community as to whether marching on Washington is still an effective strategy to use. Today, marches tend to have less political impact because they have become less an act of defiance that lead to arrests or confrontation. Marginalized groups often march on weekends when no one is present. Even though marches may have little political impact, marches can still be important to its participants. National marches and local Pride parades generate energy, enthusiasm, a sense of unity and belonging. Marches and parades empower members of the marginalized group who may feel alone and isolated. It is important to determine the primary goal of any march or parade; for, if the event is for celebration, boosting morale or strengthening community, then a march or parade is the strategy to employ. However, if the primary goal is political and social change, then a more effective strategy may be needed. [48]

Another leadership strategy utilized by Rustin was integrationism. This approach caused coalition building and politics to be at forefront of all Rustin attempted. His commitment to economic justice, democracy, NVDA and interracialism were all equally important as he built coalition and consensus. An

unwavering integrationist, Rustin was criticized by the separatists of the Civil Rights Movement that emerged as that movement splintered in the late 1960's.

In Rustin's article, "From Protest to Politics: The Future of the Civil Rights Movement," written in February of 1965, he expressed the need for replacing demonstrations as the primary strategy of the Civil Rights Movement with coalition politics. [49] He argued that the early tactics of protests, though successful, would need to shift to the building of community institutions and power bases if the Civil Rights Movement was to remain effective. Rustin contended that Africans Americans' ability to sit at an integrated lunch counter held little value if the person did not have the money to purchase lunch. Rustin believed the movement had to address not only race relations, but also economic relations. Rustin knew that African Americans did not have the political power to bring about the desired change on their own; hence the need for allies. Rustin's solution called for a coalition of progressive forces that included African Americans, trade unions, liberals and religious groups. [50] Rustin knew that the best opportunity for lasting racial and economic justice for African Americans belonged in the ongoing commitment and in the alignment of like minded allies. A broad coalition of progressives was Rustin's greatest hope as well as his greatest disappointment. By definition, a coalition required compromise, compromises that some members were unwilling to make.

As Rustin struggled within the Civil Rights Movement regarding coalition politics and coalition building, Troy Perry was working to resolve the ongoing

religious discrimination against GLBT Christians. At first glance, Perry's founding of MCC that was comprised primarily of GLBT members appeared to be a separatist solution. However, like Rustin, Perry was committed to integration and acceptance of the GLBT community into larger society. MCC began because GLBT people were rejected in mainstream churches due to sexual orientation. MCC began out of a necessity as a spiritual refuge and filled a spiritual vacuum for GLBT people, their families and allies. MCC crossed denominational lines, racial, gender, class and national boundaries as it created a vehicle for spirituality, activism and public witness. [51] MCC brought about a larger consciousness within mainstream denominations.

A sociologist of religion, Steven Warner, studied MCC and believed Perry helped to change the complexion of Christianity. "Perry has had the audacity and the tenacity to claim for gay and lesbian people the religious and civil rights that most Americans have the privilege to take for granted." [52] Warner believed that Perry and MCC were reformist in that both sought change. They were also similar in that both affirmed the value of "two conservative institutions - the church and marriage." Perry and others who seek marriage equality do not want to put an end to marriage; they want to participate in the institution. However, like the separatists of Rustin's day, some people in the GLBT community reject the institution of marriage and view all churches as homophobic.[53]

A final strategy that both Rustin and Perry espoused for the GLBT community is for people to "come out" as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender

and to be honest about their sexual orientation. Being true to one's self and speaking truth to other people are empowering tools for personal growth and overall well being. In response to coming out as a homosexual man, Rustin believed that:

> Every gay who is in the closet is ultimately a threat to the freedom of gays. I don't want to seem intolerant to them, and I think we have to say that to them with a great deal of affection, but remaining in the closet is the other side of prejudice against gays. Because until you challenge it (prejudice), you are not playing an active role in fighting it.[54]

Even as social movements grow and evolve, so too, must the leadership and strategies of the movement. Nascent social movements that began with demonstrations (sit-ins, freedom rides, marches) must, as they mature, create political coalitions to further their long term goals. Marginalized groups, like African Americans and GLBT people, simply do not have the numbers or the political clout on their own to bring about the change they desire.

Conclusion

The debate regarding the similarities and differences of the Civil Rights and Gay Rights Movements, though interesting and necessary, does not bring about the equality that both movements seek and deserve. Marginalized African Americans and GLBT people, in the midst of their diversity and similarities, must decide to come together for the greater good of both movements.

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Chapter Five
Thinking Globally *AND* Acting Locally

Introduction

I have discovered that there are moments in life when we become a different person - a better version of our original self, a manifestation of someone who has always been within us - who needed the proper time and inspiration to appear. My personal epiphany came in 2004. My call to ministry and life shifted and would never be the same. I would never be the same. The passion and power I felt as I aligned with a justice issue larger than myself left an indelible mark on who I am and how I view my role in the world.

The Supreme Court of Massachusetts legalized same sex marriage in November 2003 which led to a subsequent backlash in Georgia during the 2004 legislative cycle. Worried that marriage equality would be forced upon the entire state, political officials and opponents of gay marriage in the state of Georgia crafted resolutions in the Georgia Senate and House of Representatives.

In early 2004, the political action group, Georgia Equality and its Executive Director, Allen Thornell, called for GLBT people and their allies to implore their elected officials to vote "NO" on Senate Resolution 595 (SR 595). Weeks of lobbying opened some doors of communication with members of the Georgia Senate and House; however, SR 595 easily passed in the Senate but was defeated in the House on the first vote. The Georgia House of Representatives, however, utilized a never-before-used rule to call for a re-vote. The second vote garnered the passage of SR 595 by three votes. SR 595 became Amendment 1

and was placed on the ballot for November 2004. The voters of Georgia and ten other states voted on similar ballot initiatives regarding gay marriage.[1] All eleven states voted overwhelmingly to change state Constitutions to define marriage as being between a man and a woman.[2]

Once SR 595 passed the Georgia Senate and House, GLBT Georgians and their allies continued to fight, even against overwhelming odds. A new group was formed; Georgians Against Discrimination (GAD) and questions of leadership came into play. As I worked with the leaders of GAD regarding the need for collaboration among GLBT people, Caucasians, African Americans, religious people and straight allies during our state wide fight against Amendment 1, I realized that much of the work of coalition building had never been done. Issues around race and gender overshadowed the goal of collaborative work and coalition building in Atlanta, often called "the city too busy to hate". Infighting and accusations of not being heard abounded in statewide GLBT conversations.

The most cohesive groups that I worked with during this time were the ecumenical, progressive faith community and a local grassroots group, Northeast Georgians Against Discrimination (NEGAD) in Athens, Georgia. NEGAD and its members worked well together because personal friendships and professional relationships had been established within the community prior to Amendment 1. Additionally, there was a genuine attempt to have people with diverse gender, racial and sexual orientations in NEGAD leadership. Negative attitudes and egos were minimal and the group organized for the common good and purpose of

informing and asking the people of Athens to vote "NO" on Amendment 1.

The opponents of gay marriage in Georgia were organized, clear about their objective and ready to mobilize, usually within area churches and around conservative politicians. Statewide, this group was successful with 77% of those voting in Georgia voting "YES" on Amendment 1. In Athens, Georgia; however, the voters responded by a slim margin to pass the amendment: 52% to 48%.

The coalition building of NEGAD made tangible differences for the GLBT community in 2006. NEGAD leaders led the push for Athens-Clarke County to vote unanimously to amend the city's non-discrimination policy to add protections for sexual orientation, gender identity and pregnancy status. The alliance of leaders educated and successfully lobbied the officials of Athens-Clarke County for domestic partnership benefits for city employees and their same sex partners in December. In April 2006, the University of Georgia (UGA) offered limited benefits to employees' same-sex partners. UGA also added sexual orientation to its non-discrimination and anti-harassment policies.[3]

NEGAD's work in lobbying and developing relationships with local activists and fair minded citizens elicited positive change through a concerted effort and by building relationships within the community. Although not glamorous or high profile, this type of activism was effective. My personal involvement with this type of activism taught me that it was harder for local Athenians to ignore the issue of GLBT equality when they knew someone who identified as GLBT.

Lessons Learned:

Current and emerging leaders of the broader Gay Rights Movement would be wise to understand and implement lessons from the Civil Rights Movement. Though not an exhaustive list, the lessons noted in the following pages are important in creating a more sustainable and successful Gay Rights Movement. As leaders and activists apply these lessons to the Gay Rights Movement, they can create broader possibilities for substantive change.

Grassroots Activism and Local Leadership

The Civil Rights Movement modeled the use of grassroots activism to solicit needed change for African Americans. The localized Montgomery Bus Boycott of December 1955 gave birth to what became the Civil Rights Movement. The effectiveness of the broader Civil Rights Movement occurred because African Americans on the local level were unwilling to endure the unfair treatment of the Jim Crow South, but were willing to incur its wrath publicly to demonstrate injustice. Similarly, the Stonewall Riots of 1969 in New York birthed the modern Gay Rights Movement. The Civil Rights and Gay Rights Movements found their origins and strength in local events which galvanized mass movements for equality and justice in society. In the beginning, the early protests of the Civil Rights Movement utilized only a small number of trained activists; however, in a short time, over 50,000 people in Southern towns successfully staged sit-ins at lunch counters, bowling alleys, theaters and hotels.[4]

In the same way that grassroots activism gave power to the broader Civil

Rights Movement, so too, can local leadership strengthen the overall Gay Rights Movement. The local leadership model seems to work better when trust and relationships can be established prior to a crisis. The overall success of the Gay Rights Movement occurs when GLBT people choose to accept and embrace the inherent diversity within the broader movement.

While the Gay Rights Movement does have dedicated professionals and national advocacy organizations[5] like the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), Lambda Legal and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) that can offer leadership; the movement cannot depend solely on national groups to usher in the equality for the GLBT community. Neither can these national organizations be viewed as superior to or as more important than local and state organizations. Additionally, addressing the broader issues of race, gender and socio-economic status is important for organizational and individual leadership if the Gay Rights Movement is to build long term momentum and success.

Movement Strategies

NVDA was the primary tool that African Americans and leaders of the Civil Rights Movement used to demonstrate unjust treatment of marginalized groups on local levels. African Americans throughout the Jim Crow South staged sit-ins, demonstrations, Freedom Rides and marches to demonstrate the injustices they faced on a daily basis. The ability to dramatize oppression through nonviolent means forced the media and fair minded people to wrestle with the reality of irrational hatred that was embedded in racism.

NVDA in the form of sit-ins was successful because participants had a direct impact on the economic well being of the businesses. Paying customers could not be seated because demonstrators occupied the counter. Furthermore, the demonstrators dispelled stereotypes of African Americans as poor and ignorant by dressing professionally and requesting service. When refused service, they remained seated and accepted abuse without retaliation. NVDA sit-ins worked because they provoked hostile responses from violent racists that could not be ignored by fair minded people.[6]

People within the Gay Rights Movement must be willing to expose the homophobia of their opponents in order for fair minded people to understand the challenges of the GLBT community. GLBT people need to be willing to use their bodies to create change and call upon our young people to join this type of activism. Currently, there is a shortage of ACT-UP and Lesbian Avenger chapters that practice NVDA. This reality begs the question of whether the GLBT community is willing to demonstrate with their bodies in a strategic way. Some of the young adults within the Gay Rights Movement have embodied the change they seek by participating in Soulforce's Equality Rides. The tension between protecting our young adult GLBT members and utilizing them as agents of change must remain in forefront of any movement strategy. Whenever homophobia results in the death of a GLBT person, action must be taken to remind all people of the consequences of hatred towards our youth and children.[7]

Political Allies

African Americans did not have the numbers to bring about racial equality in the United States; neither does the GLBT community. As marginalized groups, both African Americans and GLBT people need allies in order to obtain full equality. The need for allies motivated Civil Rights activists to seek progressive alliances with union leaders, liberal organizations and clergy in the hopes of garnering enough support to gain passage of the Civil Rights Bill.

Politically, elected officials are pragmatic when it comes to supporting Civil or Gay Rights legislation, especially when it comes to the opinions of their constituents and allies. Lobbying elected officials on the local, state and national levels can help bring about legislative gains. Creating alliances where GLBT voters also advocate for other marginalized groups can also produce broader coalitions and voter blocks.

Legislative and Long Term Strategies

> Morals cannot be legislated, but behavior can be regulated. The law cannot make an employer love me, but it can keep him from refusing to hire me because of the color of my skin.[8] ~Martin Luther King, Jr.

The leaders of the Gay Rights Movement must realize that any long term strategies for equality require a multi-pronged approach. Even though judicial systems cannot legislate opinions, there is a powerful correlation between legal changes and attitudinal shifts. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 made public racial segregation and employment discrimination illegal while it also dismantled school segregation and discrimination in all federally funded programs.

If meaningful and lasting change is to occur for the GLBT community, then GLBT people must participate in all aspects of society. GLBT people must "come out" about their sexual orientation. A closeted majority does not translate into a powerful political movement with a national presence. When GLBT people are working in different arenas and have different political and ideological differences, they must view each other as partners in the struggle for equality.[9]

Attitude Adjustments

One of the greatest lessons the Gay Rights Movement can learn from the Civil Rights Movement and Bayard Rustin is that sometimes, one must step back and be willing to not take credit for one's contribution. Rustin collaborated and wrote a document that explained pacifism, *Speak Truth to Power*. He refused to be listed as one of the authors because it would have limited the effectiveness of the document due to his arrest in California.[10] The Gay Rights Movement could be more influential if this attitude of putting the movement before personal agendas could be embodied by local, state and national leaders.

Any person who does more than a cursory reading of the Civil Rights Movement will find that serious disagreements occurred among the leaders of the various organizations. Disagreements and ideological difference could have derailed the 1963 March on Washington; however, A. Philip Randolph and Rustin negotiated compromises that satisfied the key leaders and allowed the event to continue. The Civil Rights Movement splintered in the late 1960's when some of the newer leaders proposed a separatist solution instead of integrating into larger

society. Separatist leaders rejected NVDA and called for any means necessary to gain equality. Movement activists disagreed on the direction and strategy. They realized, too late, that public criticism of leaders with differing views was self-defeating and demoralized members of the larger movement.[11] Leaders of the Gay Rights Movement must learn these lessons before the GLBT grassroots members give up in frustration because of conflicts and a refusal to compromise. An attitudinal adjustment could become a reality as leaders adopt personal and guiding principles. One such example includes the "Guidelines for Recognizing and Valuing Difference" that was first created by the founders of VISIONS, Inc. which enables participants to agree on how "to be in community" in the midst of difference and diversity.[12] A modeling or even an honest attempt at self-evaluation with the use of this tool (or similar tools) could signal to the broader Gay Rights Movement and society that leaders and activists are maturing as individuals and are willing to embrace different people. The call to mature as a movement, as leaders and as human beings within a larger global community has never been greater and more necessary.

Spirituality

One key strength of the Civil Rights Movement was the spirituality of its leaders and local activists. African Americans were empowered by their faith during the long fight for equality. The Christian commitment of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and others formed the foundation for much of the success of the overall Movement. Although the oppressors of African Americans used God and the

Bible to condemn them, African Americans refused to relinquish their rights to a God of injustice and exclusion. The spirituality of African Americans grounded the movement with a cause greater than any one person or ideology. Even the activists who did not identify as Christian or religious accepted the value of others' spirituality as a legitimate and respected part of the overall movement. I believe the spirituality of members of the Civil Rights Movement enabled them to develop an inner strength and depth of character that impacted the success of the movement.

Unfortunately, I do not believe this is true in the Gay Rights Movement. It seems that people who identify as spiritual are viewed with suspicion within the larger Gay Rights Movement. It has been my personal experience that some GLBT people who oppose organized religion find it difficult to work with people who identify as Christian. I think the reason for this division is a consequence of extreme abuse of the GLBT community by fundamentalist Christians. Ironically, some members of the GLBT community demand equality and acceptance and yet are not willing to accept the spiritual diversity within the broader Gay Rights Movement.

It is time for the members of the Gay Rights Movement to develop an inner strength and a depth of character that frames the discussion of equal rights for all people. A key component to this type of social movement lies within its movement members and their spirituality, which calls for a higher purpose. The spirituality of the GLBT community may be one of the greatest untapped

resources for lasting change and social equality. In addition to the spirituality of the GLBT community, members of this marginalized group must choose to invest their abilities, time and financial resources into the issues of equality, not only for themselves but also for the broader humanity. Social activists like Bayard Rustin and Troy Perry understood that full freedom and equality could not be reserved for "their people only." Equality is most radical when it is inclusive of more people than "one's own kind."[13] When the members of the Gay Rights Movement grasp the power of true inclusion, the power of change could be unstoppable.

Practical Strategies: Come Out!

Both Rustin and Perry showed that even one person could make a lasting difference for equality and social justice. Their lives and legacies illuminate the path for future generations of justice seekers. If the work of GLBT equality is to continue, it will be the responsibility of current and emerging leaders of the Gay Rights Movement. The future of the Movement is also in the hands of every GLBT person. There is a correlation between GLBT equality and personally knowing someone who is GLBT. Coming out is a courageous step toward equality for all gay men, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender individuals. In this second decade of the 21st century, it is hard to imagine that less than fifty years ago, homosexuals used pseudonyms because they feared the loss of their jobs, homes and families.[14]

Coming out to one's self is the first step toward integrating one's sexuality into other aspects of one's life. Coming out to family members, friends, co-

workers, classmates and religious leaders frees up the individual while also advancing the larger cause for GLBT equality. It is my belief that if straight allies and family members of GLBT people would also "come out" in support of the GLBT community, it would signal to society that there is a growing majority of fair minded people who support GLBT individuals and their need for equality. The national organization, Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), has an excellent program called "Straight for Equality" that enables allies to come out as supporters of GLBT equality.[15]

Additionally, GLBT people and their allies need to also come out regarding their spirituality. If the Gay Rights Movement is to benefit from embracing its spiritual diversity, it must begin to see the healthy integration of spirituality and sexuality within its members, leaders and allies. Committing to a practice of including different spiritual realities within the Gay Rights Movement could model a more healthy approach for emerging leadership and to the broader society.

How many GLBT people still financially support organizations, denominations and churches that actively oppose GLBT equality? How many GLBT people share their gifts and abilities in the worship experiences of these churches? Would religious homophobia experience a quicker death if the musicians, choir directors, lay leaders, church teachers and clergy who were GLBT came out and refused to serve or give of their time and resources until GLBT people were treated equally? I wonder what kind of change would be forthcoming if every GLBT person and their allies within mainstream churches

began to demand religious equality within their churches? Courage and a long term commitment are key ingredients to this necessary strategy. I concur with Bayard Rustin's reprimand of GLBT people who refuse to come out because in not taking a stand for themselves, they are complicit in ongoing homophobia and other interlocking oppressions.[16]

Get Involved and Take a Stand

The first time I read the Guidelines for Recognizing and Valuing Difference I found at least three of the seven original principles were applicable for GLBT people who want to actively engage in the broader Gay Rights Movement. The principle, "it's okay to disagree. It's not okay to shame, blame or attack oneself or others," [17] could revolutionize how GLBT people treat each other. The principle, "practice both/and thinking," if implemented, could drastically reduce public and private arguments regarding movement strategy and the never ending argument of "national versus local grassroots work". The guideline, "take hundred percent (100%) responsibility for one's own learning" [18], if slightly modified "to take 100% responsibility for one's own behavior and movement involvement" could direct emerging leaders to mature as people and as leaders within the Gay Rights Movement. GLBT individuals must get involved and take a personal stand and become involved in GLBT justice issues. Individuals who are more passionate about grassroots organizing and how to impact local communities can get involved with local and state organizations. People who are passionate about national organizing and broader federal issues can get involved

with state and national organizations. The high stakes for GLBT equality calls for everyone to stop debating which strategy is better and, like the Civil Rights Movement, use both approaches. The time for the either or mentality has passed. It does not work well in politics, it does not work well in religion, and it does not work well in social movements. Current and emerging Gay Rights leaders must transition from the either or paradigm into a broader, more pluralistic approach if they are to succeed as a diverse and enduring social movement. Societal opinions will change as more people come out as both GLBT and spiritual, get involved with the movement and do their part in creating a more just and equitable society.

Faith Based Actions: [19]

"Come Out" as Justice Seeking Denominations and Congregations

Just as individuals need to come out as GLBT or as allies, so too, must churches and denominations "come out" as justice seeking faith based communities. Similarly, faith based groups and religious organizations must take action to usher in a broader range of social justice and equality. Sacred scriptures speak of a God of justice and inclusion, while also calling for an end to oppression of women, children and foreigners within the dominant culture. Christians are at their best when they follow the teachings of Jesus to love God and their neighbors as one's self[20] and to treat the "least of these people" as one would treat Jesus the Christ. [21]

However, church after church seems to have lost its way when it comes to

expressing love of God and love of neighbor, especially when that neighbor is a GLBT person. The tension between how scripture is interpreted regarding sexuality and the treatment of GLBT people within various denominations is far from resolved; however, some mainstream churches have begun to examine their views on the issue of homosexuality. Ongoing discernment and dialogue regarding homosexuality are necessary for any denomination of this generation. Faith based actions call for a sincere effort to be made by all people of faith if the rift between sexuality and spirituality is to diminish. Churches and denominations that find spirituality and homosexuality to be compatible need to continue their ongoing commitment to justice and equality. These denominations are needed as prophetic voices within society regarding not only sexuality and spirituality, but also broader issues of injustice regarding racism, misogyny and other interlocking oppressions. The work of justice seeking churches and denominations is never done. The more prophetic the voice for justice, the longer it may take for society to respond. Progressive churches and denominations cannot do everything at once; however, this does not absolve them from seeking to create a more just and equitable society—for those within and beyond their membership. Fair minded and justice seeking denominations deserve the loyal support of GLBT people. GLBT people who are not religious might consider financially supporting religious denominations that are advocating for GLBT equality and seeking religious equality for all people. Chris Glaser, in *Reformation of the Heart: Seasonal Meditations by a Gay Christian,* implores

GLBT Christians to build relationships, coalitions and commit to teamwork within broader religious communities, even though they may be hesitant to trust a religious system that has, at times, been problematic for them and other marginalized people.[22]

Build Spiritual Coalitions

Since its beginning, MCC has sought to build religious coalition first by applying for membership within the National Council of Churches (NCC), even though MCC was not accepted into the NCC due to its stance regarding homosexuality. In recent years, The Center for Progressive Christianity (TCPC) has emerged as a viable option for progressives who want to collaborate on a wide range of social issues.[23] Some MCC congregations are members of TCPC. Likewise, MCC congregations have also begun to collaborate with like minded groups and denominations: the United Church of Christ; The Fellowship; the Unitarian Universalist Churches of America and key groups of other mainstream denominations. MCC churches and other progressive Christian denominations must continue to build or join existing coalitions that are committed to social justice issues. GLBT Christians need to proactively build bridges and coalitions with allies and with spiritual people who have not yet worked with the GLBT community. These interactions will cause attitudes to be changed.

Education

GLBT Christians and the denominations that embrace GLBT people must continually work to educate people about the importance of social justice.

People who are committed to living as followers of Jesus the Christ need to know of the spiritual value and teachings to care for the "least of these" on the earth: the poor, oppressed, widows, orphans and all who are marginalized by society. Work must be done to educate clergy and laity about the need to deconstruct commonly held beliefs within conservative Christianity that still marginalize women, children, people of color, and GLBT people. Reconstruction of contemporary theology based on a new hermeneutic is the first step to what must occur within Christianity during the 21st century. Connected to the need for deconstructing some theologies and reconstructing more progressive theology for this century, GLBT Christians and their allies can use existing educational tools, such as the VISIONS, Inc. "Guidelines for Recognizing and Valuing Difference"[24] to model how to collaborate in the midst of spiritual diversity. Conferences, seminars, workshops and other gatherings, both in person and via the Internet, would enhance a progressive education and spiritual development. GLBT people and other progressive people can and must have a primary role in a positive reconstruction of Christianity through these endeavors. This type of existing and ongoing education can improve GLBT equality as well as a broader global equality.

Contemporary, Societal and 21st Century Tools:

To positively impact the Gay Rights Movement in the 21st century; the focus needs to include the message for GLBT equality and effective methods on how to deliver this message. The message for GLBT equality must be seen as

one aspect of the larger call for equality for all. Women, people of color, children, GLBT people and all marginalized people deserve to be treated with dignity and as human beings. The call for GLBT equality is located within the broader history of equality; therefore, the GLBT message must be supportive of other equally marginalized groups. So, how do GLBT people and organizations communicate the need for equality? History must be told, recorded and created. Interestingly, history is often told from the viewpoint of the dominant straight male culture. Yet, GLBT equality hinges on the storytelling of gay men, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people. Everyone's story must be communicated in order to affect future changes. I propose three concepts that could advance the GLBT cause for equality: coming out narratives; films, documentaries and plays; and graphic novels.

Coming Out Narratives

The principles of a good story involve a character who wants something and overcomes adversity to get what is sought.[25] According to Don Miller, the main way stories are most effectively received is through individual interaction. The way peoples' moral compasses are changed is by interacting with others. People who tell their life stories change what the listener thinks. Telling a good story about one's life, according to Miller, will motivate others to also tell stories about their lives[25] because stories compel people to take action. Personal stories of struggle and hardship call for a human response. Storytelling is a meaningful way to communicate truth while also engaging the listener. Telling

the story of one's struggle as a GLBT person can open up avenues of discussion and dialogue with people who might never have considered the challenges faced by GLBT people. Storytelling offers glimpses into the different lives of people. Quality storytelling can create healthy respect and discourse between people who are vastly different. Storytelling also reminds people that life is not one dimensional for GLBT people or for straight people, rather, life is complex and multi-dimensional. As GLBT people tell their stories sincerely, factually and with a focus on their common humanity, positive change and action will occur.[27]

Films, Documentaries and Plays

One on one conversation and people telling their stories will change the minds and hearts of fair minded people regarding GLBT equality. Storytelling will make a lasting change for GLBT people and their communities. Creating films, documentaries and plays are also needed to communicate these same stories more broadly throughout society. Two such documentaries tell the stories of Bayard Rustin and Troy Perry. *Brother Outsider* chronicles the life and legacy of Rustin; while *Call Me Troy* details Perry's life. Both documentaries have introduced these men to this generation of Gay Rights activists, emerging leaders and allies. Using the medium of films and documentaries can hasten society's understanding of the need for GLBT equality.

Additionally, what about creating screen plays and Broadway shows based on the lives of Bayard Rustin and Troy Perry? The creative genius of playwrights could easily create scripts and plays about the contributions of both

Rustin and Perry for their respective social movements and for the larger society. The medium of screen plays and shows can impact people while also being a transformative tool for effectively communicating GLBT issues and equality.

Graphic Novels

Along this same line, Gay Rights activists need to develop a strategy to record the story of not only key leaders, but also the overall Gay Rights Movement. The GLBT Historical Society archives the stories of GLBT people[28] and other groups that preserve GLBT history must be supported if the GLBT community wants their history to be accurately communicated beyond this generation. In addition to more traditional ways of recording GLBT history and the stories of individuals, a newer medium, graphic novels, may connect with GLBT and straight youth of this generation. Graphic novels wrestle with the tough issues of contemporary society such as religion, race, global politics and social revolution. Mark Siegel, editorial director of First Second Books and publisher of graphic novels, desires "to tackle big things in new ways." [29] Why not use graphic novels to communicate the GLBT struggle for equality?

Although comics have been stigmatized in the United States as juvenile, fantastical and harmful, this label has begun to dissolve in recent years. Interestingly, comics in Japan and Europe have never been stigmatized where artists have a head start on creating thoughtful, mature graphic novels. [30] For example, Alison Bechdel's 2007 graphic novel, *Fun Home*, depicts her tragic childhood as she came out as a lesbian. In 2009, the life story of Nelson

Mandela was illustrated in the graphic novel, *Nelson Mandela: The Authorized Comic Book.* [31] Graphic novels are a promising way to communicate both the history and stories of the Gay Rights Movement while also highlighting stories of GLBT leaders, activists and everyday people who all have an important story to tell to this generation regarding the important issue of equality.

Since members and leaders of the Gay Rights Movement are creative, resourceful people; they are not limited to the current ways they communicate the message of GLBT equality. In addition to the suggestions of this chapter, the use of contemporary technology and social networks continues to revolutionize how GLBT people get their message out. The commitment to a "both/and" concept regarding the high touch strategies of one on one conversation and personal storytelling as well as the high tech strategies of social networking and global Internet communications can positively impact the outcome for broader GLBT acceptance and full equality.

Conclusion

The list of lessons learned from the Civil Rights Movement is a positive start in developing Gay Rights Movement strategy. Wise GLBT leaders will gratefully accept the wisdom of this earlier social movement to avoid pitfalls that hamper progress, while also implementing successful strategies that can work in the current Gay Rights Movement.

The practical strategy of coming out as individuals, as spiritual people and as faith communities committed to social justice may be the most powerful tool to

bring about equality. Faith based actions of coalition building and education offer unprecedented options for long-lasting social justice.

The GLBT community has unparalleled opportunities for getting its message out. 0Personal and collective actions will be necessary to bring about the equality that GLBT people seek and deserve.

Notes

1. Gary Mucciaroni, *Same Sex, Different Politics: Success and Failure in the Struggles Over Gay Rights* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 235.

2. Politics: MSNBC, "Voters Pass All 11 Bans on Gay Marriage: Ballot Initiatives Pave the Way for New Court Battles," MSNBC, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6383353/ (accessed February 18, 2008).

3. Eric Ervin, "A Roller-coaster Year for Gay Atlanta: Local Governments Pass Several Gay-Inclusive Bills," The Williams Institute: UCLA School of Law, http://www.law.ucla.edu/williamsinstitute/press/ARollerCoasterYearForGayAtlanta.html (accessed February 18, 2008).

4. Mary Jo Festle, "Listening to the Civil Rights Movement," *The Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide* 12, no. 6 (2005). http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb.?did=940559181&Fmt=3&clientId=30345&RQT=309&VName=PQD (accessed February 3, 2010).

5. The Human Rights Campaign (http://www.hrc.org/), historically, has been perceived as being predominantly wealthy, white and male; whereas, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (http://thetaskforce.org/) began as a predominantly grassroots organization. Lambda Legal promotes legal advancements within the GLBT community. (http://www.lambdalegal.org/)

6. Mary Jo Festle, "Listening to the Civil Rights Movement," *The Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide* 12, no. 6 (2005). http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb.?did=940559181&Fmt=3&clientId=30345&RQT=309&VName=PQD (accessed February 3, 2010).

7. Ibid.

8. Coretta Scott King, ed. *The Words of Martin Luther King Jr.* (New York: Newmarket Press, 1984), 27.

9. Mary Jo Festle, "Listening to the Civil Rights Movement," *The Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide* 12, no. 6 (2005). http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb.?did=940559181&Fmt=3&clientId=30345&RQT=309&VName=PQD (accessed February 3, 2010).

10. Calvin Craig Miller, *No Easy Answers: Bayard Rustin and the Civil Rights Movement* (Greensboro: Morgan and Reynolds Publishing, 2005), 102.

11. Mary Jo Festle, "Listening to the Civil Rights Movement," *The Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide* 12, no. 6 (2005). http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb.?did=940559181&Fmt=3&clientId=30345&RQT=309&VName=PQD (accessed February 3, 2010).

12. William M. Kondrath, *God's Tapestry: Understanding and Celebrating Differences* (Herndon: The Alban Institute, 2008), 4.

13. Jerald Podair, Bayard Rustin: American Dreamer (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 111.

14. Troy D. Perry, Jr., Telephone interview by author, February 3, 2009.

15. Straight for Equality: PFLAG, "What is Straight for Equality?" PFLAG, http://www.straightforequality.org/ (accessed March 17, 2010).

16. Devon W. Carbado and Donald Weise, eds., *Time on Two Crosses: The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin* (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2003), 278.

17. Kondrath, 4.

18. Kondrath, 5.

19. The author acknowledges that GLBT spirituality is found in all world religions and a broader strategy to include GLBT Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, etc. is needed. However, due to the limitations of the author, the focus of this project and the dominant role that Christianity plays in oppressing the GLBT community; this thesis focus is limited to Christianity. Ideally, all GLBT people of faith and their allies will enter all religious dialogues to make their presence known and their voices heard.

20. Matthew 22:37-38 (The New Oxford Annotated Bible, NRSV, 3rd ed.).

21. Matthew 25:40.

22. Chris Glaser, Reformation of the Heart: Seasonal Meditations by a Gay Christian (Louisville: Westminster John Know Press, 2001), 155.

23. The Center for Progressive Christianity is a broad coalition of churches and individuals that seek social justice. (http://www.tcpc.org/template/index.cfm) There are 8 guiding principles for all who choose to align with the Center for Progressive Christianity. (http://www.tcpc.org/about/8points.cfm)

24. Kondrath, 5.

25. Don Miller, "The Story of Your Life," *Sojourners*, January 2010, 12.

26. Miller, 13.

27. Miller, 46.

28. Meredith Maran and Angela Watrous, eds., **50 Ways to Support Lesbian and Gay Equality* (Maui: Inner Ocean Publishing, 2005), 52. *This book is an excellent resource for practical strategies.

29. Van Jensen, "Nothing Comic about It," *Sojourners*, November 2009, 42.

30. Jensen, 44.

31. Jensen, 45.

Chapter Six

Justice and Equality: An Unfinished Calling

When I consider all the injustice that GLBT people still face, I often feel overwhelmed and even angry. How can human beings, created in the image of a loving and just God, be so hateful and judgmental toward human beings who are GLBT? How do fair minded people stem this tide of homophobia? Can one person, committed to social justice, really make a difference? As a Christian minister, I regularly proclaim that one person, Jesus the Christ, made a huge difference in questioning the status quo that oppressed marginalized people. Bayard Rustin and Troy Perry also created positive changes for African Americans and GLBT people. Yet, even as overwhelming as injustice may be, I still believe that one person can make a difference. Therein rests the challenge that is now before each of us.

This thesis has changed me. I had hoped that by dedicating two years to researching and educating myself about Bayard Rustin, Troy Perry and their respective movements that I could find the answers to questions that have preoccupied my mind and heart since 2004. I had hoped to gain this knowledge and then check this justice project off my to-do-list and move on to my next important assignment. This, however, will not happen. For in the process of answering the question, "*What can the Gay Rights Movement learn from the Civil Rights Movement in order to contribute to a more just and equitable society?*", I have discovered that seeking equality for any marginalized group is painstakingly

slow and may take a lifetime or more to achieve. I have learned that it is hard enough to be a spiritual leader within the GLBT community on the best of days, much less when GLBT people refuse to collaborate and build coalitions with each other and our allies. I have learned that GLBT leaders, particularly spiritual leaders, rarely have time to reinvent the wheel in the never ending fight for equality. There are simply too many injustices and not enough time or leaders willing to lead. Therefore, it would behoove us all to acknowledge the hard-learned lessons of the Civil Rights Movement and honor that Movement and its leaders by borrowing strategies and insights that would benefit the Gay Rights Movement. Learning from past successes and mistakes of the Civil Rights Movement by implementing applicable strategies from that movement would honor the genius of Bayard Rustin. The Gay Rights Movement could borrow lessons and strategies without negating the genuine differences between the two movements. Similarities and differences do not contradict the validity or historic significance of either the Civil Rights or Gay Rights Movements. Both movements are necessary because both African Americans and GLBT people have been and are still marginalized. Even though progress has been made toward creating equality for African Americans and GLBT people in the past sixty years, much work is still unfinished.

When I reflect on truths from this project that will impact my professional ministry, I note two key realities. The first insight is that both the Civil Rights and Gay Rights Movements are about fighting interlocking oppressions, particularly

as they pertain to race and sexual orientation. I found this most clearly articulated by André Lorde who noted, "There is no hierarchy of oppressions."[1] As a black, lesbian, feminist, socialist, poet, mother of two and a member of an interracial couple,[2] Lorde was well acquainted with how it felt when the dominant culture attempted to marginalize her. Lorde did not have the luxury of fighting only one form of oppression at a time. Neither do we. Being forced to choose between being African American or GLBT; being African American or female; being African American or male; being GLBT or female; being GLBT or male are false dichotomies that keep human beings marginalized, oppressed and powerless. For if there is one reality that could unite African Americans, women, GLBT people, and any other marginalized group it is this: the oppressors of one of these groups will work to oppress all of these groups. Those who refuse to support marriage equality for GLBT people likely oppose women's rights and rights for African Americans. Freedom from intolerance and oppression is not the right of only one particular group.[3] Battling all forms of discrimination is what André Lorde did; it was what Bayard Rustin did; it is what Troy Perry continues to do and it is what each of us must do if there is to ever be a just society.

The second key similarity for me is that neither African Americans nor GLBT people can gain equality on their own. Therefore, it is an absolute necessity that both African Americans and GLBT people build coalitions beyond their own people. Marginalized people and groups need help from fair minded people who are within the dominant culture. Equally important, members of

marginalized groups must come together to increase their chances for equality.

A key difference between the Civil Rights and Gay Rights Movements is that African Americans had a multiplicity of obstacles to overcome in their fight for freedom and equality. Certainly, GLBT people have been and are still being treated unfairly, however, GLBT people can take a break from presenting as gay if they choose to; whereas, African Americans can not take a break from presenting as Black. So, I have begun to wonder if this is the irritation for African Americans when GLBT people attempt to commandeer the Civil Rights Movement as their own - without acknowledging GLBT people's choice to not present as GLBT?[4] Typically, GLBT people can hide their sexual orientation if living openly becomes too dangerous or difficult. If the GLBT community wants to learn and apply the lessons of the Civil Rights Movement to the Gay Rights Movement, then it must appreciate this foundational difference.

The deeper truth for me and for my future ministry is that "oppression is oppression is oppression" and that comparing "degrees of oppression" is a theoretical conversation that I frankly do not have time for. Seeking to position one marginalized group as more oppressed than another group does nothing for either group's moving toward greater equality or justice.

How has this thesis project changed me as a human being? It has affirmed that my personal life and vocational call to ministry are both intimately connected to the broader scope of social justice and direct action. Personally, I will continue to align my personal choices, financial contributions and service

hours with people and organizations that are committed to social justice issues, particularly for women and children as well as for GLBT equality. Professionally, I am committed to embody, educate and call others to live out their spirituality by loving their neighbors - especially those neighbors who are being oppressed.

Ideally, this thesis was meant to open a door for people to consider the importance of creating a more just and equitable society. Bayard Rustin and Troy Perry were meant to inspire people to act for justice. Both men exemplify what ordinary people can do when committed to a cause larger than one's self. I chose to highlight Rustin and Perry in order to motivate each of us to do our part, individually and collectively, to seek justice for ourselves and other people who need our voices. The lessons noted throughout this thesis and particularly in Chapter Four are not the only lessons that can be gleaned from the Civil Rights Movement. The suggestions of Chapter Five are not exhaustive in scope. Contemporary applications for the Gay Rights Movement are as plentiful as the people who seek justice for the GLBT community. This thesis was never intended to be the final word on these topics; rather it was to inspire people to embody equality and to not give up when challenging times come. This thesis will serve its purpose as it motivates this generation of activists to do their part in creating a more just and equitable society and to motivate Christians and faith communities to intentionally call for equality for GLBT people, for African Americans and for any marginalized group.

I believe that it is less important about where a person begins and more

important about the journey a person chooses as a human being. My journey began in Mississippi in the early 1960's as the daughter of a single mother who eventually met and married a man who became my "Daddy". With education, the love and influence of key people and a clear call of God, I moved toward a stronger sense of self and an absolute clarity that God's calling encompassed far more than I had originally been led to believe in my church of origin. Growing up in Mississippi reminded me of where I have come from and some of what still needs to be changed in our world today. I thank God and the people in my life for each of the realities that have gone into making me who I am and who I am still becoming.

I am older now and have begun to wonder what my legacy will be. What have I done to leave the world a better place than I found it? What has each of us done to leave the world a better place than we found it? What have you done and more importantly, what will you do?

Two men - two movements - and our call to seek justice. What will each of us do with this information and our calling to create a more just and equitable society in the 21st century? Will we excuse ourselves from being engaged because the work is too hard, the journey too arduous and we are too busy? What will we say to this generation of GLBT youth? "Sorry, we left you such a mess! We were too busy doing our own thing to think of you!" What will we say to this generation of straight youth who might choose to be allies if we only engaged them in meaningful dialogue and conversation? Will we read about the

lives of Bayard Rustin and Troy Perry, marveling at their commitments to justice and then excuse ourselves from doing our part in the next phase of the justice journey?

> Each of us inevitable,
> Each of us limitless - each of us with his or her right upon the earth,
> Each of us allow'd the eternal purports of the earth,
> Each of us here as divinely as any is here.[5]

How will each of us answer our call to justice?

Notes:

1. Lorde, André. "There Is No Hierarchy of Oppressions." in *Dangerous Liaisons*: *Blacks, Gays and the Struggle for Equality*, ed. Eric Brandt, (New York: New Press, 1999), 306.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., 307.

4. Having the choice to take a break from presenting as GLBT does not mean that sexual orientation is a "choice". The author believes that a person's sexual orientation is both natural and biological. GLBT people do not "choose to be homosexual" any more than a straight person "chooses" to be heterosexual: all sexual orientation is viewed, by the author, as a gift from God.

5. Walt Whitman, "Salut au Monde," 11, in *Leaves of Grass*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 296.

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